

Stronger Together

A VCFSE Compact approach for Barking & Dagenham



THIS COMPACT IN 60 SECONDS

We have a vision to make Barking & Dagenham a place people are proud of and want to live, work, study and stay. This draft Compact has been developed in collaboration with the Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise sector (VCFSE) and in recognition of the fact that while we all want a better Barking & Dagenham, no one organisation can do everything.

The “Stronger Together” draft Compact seeks to convey and embed a set of principles, that will guide the way the council, its partners and subsidiaries, work with the VCFSE, to achieve outcomes. It is more than just a document. It provides a robust mechanism for effective partnership working, allowing each stakeholder to honour their commitments in an open and transparent way, to ensure we nurture empowered and sustainable communities.

To achieve better outcomes for residents, now more than ever, we need to enable effective partnerships, collaboration and relationships to flourish and grow between the council, its partners and the VCFSE.

The draft Compact seeks to gain the very best value from our relationships, connections, partnerships and agreements, which is too often seen as a purely functional process. Services are commissioned or paid for, so partners demand results. What we all seek to achieve is a balance between the delivery of good services and relational working, while retaining our innovation, creativity and boldness, to achieve outcomes in mutual interest.



What is a Compact?

Compacts outline the partnership principles between the council (or other Public Bodies) and the Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) sector. They are designed to improve relationships and provide a shared understanding of what we can expect from each other in our partnership working. The principles and commitments contained within this draft Compact are designed to enhance our contributions to residents and the community in Barking & Dagenham.

It sets out a particular “way of working”, for an effective partnership between all levels of government, including local councils, and the VCFSE sector.

These national level outcomes are:

1. A strong, diverse and independent VCFSE;
2. Effective and transparent design and development of policies, programmes and public services;
3. Responsive and high-quality programmes and services;
4. Clear arrangements for managing changes to programmes and services, and
5. An equal and fair society.

Local compacts set out a series of undertakings for the council and the VCFSE sector to help achieve these outcomes.

Our **‘Stronger Together’** draft Compact sets out how organisations in Barking & Dagenham want to work together. We aim to achieve more value from our partnerships and commitments, valuing the responsibility that comes from working together.

In this document, the “VCFSE sector” or just “the sector” indicates independent voluntary, faith or community groups, which are often registered charities. Those profit-making organisations that support community outcomes, or growth in the borough, such as social enterprises or cooperatives, are also included in the terms.



Connect, 2025

How was this draft Compact developed?

In early 2025, the council's Participation & Engagement team started a series of conversations with the VCFSE sector, to identify barriers, successes and challenges in their operations and relationships. This exercise was done in preparation for the development of a new VCFSE strategy, with the previous strategy being outdated and the impact of the pandemic and cost-of-living crisis still being prominent challenges. However, it became increasingly clear that this was not what the sector wanted, and that the development of a new strategy would be a paralleling return to civic paternalism and not reflective of the desire to shape an innovative and "back to basics" approach. Therefore, the council pivoted and agreed to work side by side with BDGiving on convening a broader conversation with the sector, offering multiple opportunities for people to engage and tell us about their experiences.

Two workshops were held in June and July 2025, attended by over 120 people (total across the two sessions) from a wide range of VCFSE organisations and departments within the council. At these sessions, participants had the opportunity to voice their concerns about the state of the relationship between LBBD and the social sector and help to map out opportunities for improvement.

It is envisaged that this document becomes the starting point that helps build future relationships and ongoing work, embedding joint working principles and committing us all to the foundational strength of partnership.



Stronger Together Workshop 1 and 2, 2025

Why have a compact?

- ❑ **The compact will strengthen and embed the principles of partnership working across the borough.**
- ❑ **No one organisation can achieve these goals alone.**
- ❑ **Because our relationships with the sector are important.**
- ❑ **Our borough has been hit hard by the cost-of-living crisis and residents experience some of the highest levels of deprivation in the country, therefore improving our VCFSE partnerships is more important than ever.**
- ❑ **Whilst we are proud of our VCFSE sector, it is also the smallest (per capita) in London and we know the sector receives far lower levels of funding compared to neighbouring boroughs.**
- ❑ **To reset the dial, improving the basics and harnessing the power of our networks and connections.**



Introduction

Golden Thread:

BY 2030, Barking and Dagenham will have an increased, vibrant, empowered, and resilient VCFSE sector with increased opportunities for all - *strengthening the VCFSE sector*

BY fostering a collaborative and inclusive environment where the VCFSE sector can work in partnership with the council and build capacity - *based on collaboration and partnership*

TO create a thriving inclusive community where everyone can achieve their potential to maximise community benefit and enhance the quality of life for residents in Barking and Dagenham - *recognising health inequalities and challenges within Barking and Dagenham*



Volunteer Celebration 2025

Context:

Barking and Dagenham has undergone a significant transformation over the past five years, experiencing growth opportunities and innovations. New models, participatory methodologies and champions of relational approaches have emerged to address some of our biggest challenges. This vibrant and diverse showcase of community examples and approaches has set a precedent for the resilience and growth of the sector.

Some notable examples include BD Collective and the new Community Benefit Society model, BD Giving, Participatory City, Citizens Advice Bureau, The Cost-of-Living Alliance, The Faith Leaders Network and many more... Additionally we have implemented strategies such as the Good Food Plan, and Residents and Communities Strategy, and used these as tools to combat gaps outlined in the Borough Manifesto.

We are proud of these initiatives, and what is achieved when the Council and the VCFSE join forces. Though it hasn't always been easy or frictionless, this work has built upon the idea that residents, organisations and institutions can work well together, demonstrating the resilience and aspirations for a vibrant, diverse sector and this has been recognised, acknowledged and in some cases replicated across the country. The VCFSE sector in B&D has remained stable, with little growth, however it has continued to meet the evolving needs of the community and continues provide invaluable insights to shape the direction of the place.

This draft Compact acknowledges the work that has been done before, the foundation that has been created and how we can all support the sector to leverage their voice and aspirations to ensure that we are working together. By leveraging the strengths of the sector, we will ensure our community is equipped to face future challenges and seize new opportunities.

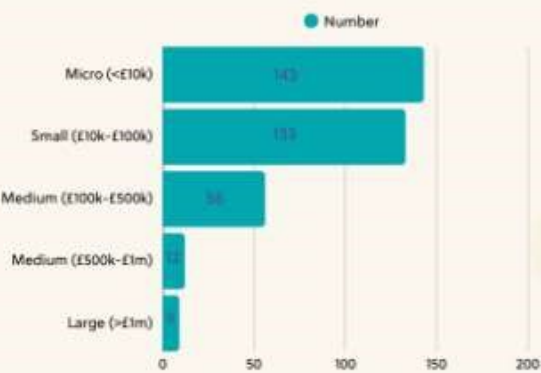
This journey has not been without its challenges. The impacts of COVID-19, the cost-of-living crisis and systemic pressures mean that the next four years may be a significant struggle for many residents, businesses and organisations. The system is under pressure and with insecurities in our economy we recognise our role as a system leader in tackling inequality. As a partner we will continue to champion engagement in the delivery of our equality objectives,

advocating for greater participation in our systems, and work with a place-based approach, in partnership and in support of our local community wherever possible.

We acknowledge we need a partnership approach to address the challenges that face our communities, with a focus on maintaining and strengthening relationships across the system. In our Corporate Plan, we are committed to working in partnership, building on the success of our collaborations to create and support thriving communities where everyone can achieve their potential and maximise the community benefit and quality of life for residents in Barking and Dagenham. This draft Compact aims to further embed and strengthen the principles that guide the way we work together and help us build relationships based on trust, shared values and help nurture a thriving VCFSE sector into the future.

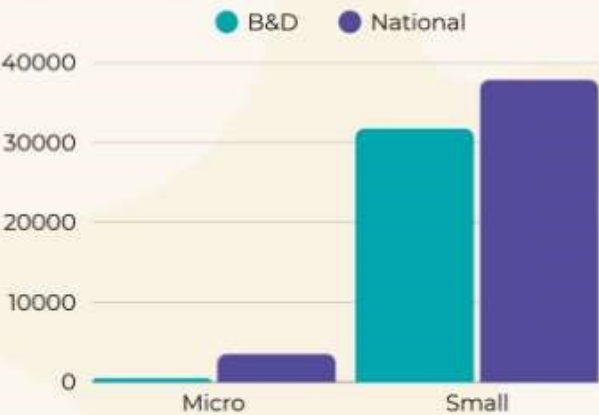
Charities in Barking and Dagenham

Active charities: 354

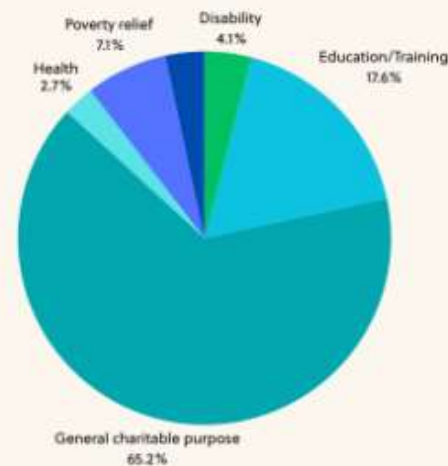


Data source: Charity Commission

Median income for micro and small charities



Median income (Source - NCVO Almanac 2024):
• B&D micro: £471 (National: £3500)
• B&D small: £31k (National: £38k)



Primary Activity (Source: Charity Commission)

71%

of charities include 'Religious Activities' as one of the things their charity does.

Comparison

- The Datawise London dashboard identifies 65% of B&D charities as religious, with the London average being 34%.
- They account for 51% of the total charitable income in the borough, over double the London average of 19%.
- In FY 23/24, they received 31% of all grants made into B&D, almost triple the London average of 11%.

SHARED PRINCIPLES

These are our shared principles.

Relational Culture – Building a culture of trust, openness, and learning

We will ensure we continue to build on our relationships by working in mutual respect, promoting co-design, joint problem solving and collaboration across sectors. We also need to recognise when things are not quite right and ensure that the environment lends itself to compromise, work to foster honesty, curiosity, transparent decision-making and open communication.

Capacity and Resources - Rethinking funding and procurement

We have all worked hard in exceptional circumstances to deliver the best possible services to residents. Whether it be a VCFSE organisation or a public body, all are working under more stringent financial constraints than ever before. In this environment, it is more difficult to allow innovation to thrive, to be brave and bold with funding methods and to enable alternative models to become the norm. As scrutiny and reporting becomes a more taxing part of project delivery, it is more challenging for public bodies and funders to allow space for experimentation. However, this is exactly what we commit to doing. We will demystify the procurement process with a new strategy, ensure that funding availability is clearer and more transparent, and we will explore at pace, future funding models and, where possible, allow space for experimentation and learning together, whilst retaining an emphasis on achieving value for money and best outcomes for residents.

Listening well – Networks and relationships

Together, we are stronger. This is no more evident than when we engage and work with residents. There is a need for public bodies to reconnect, both with the VCFSE sector and with residents. The council recognise that they are not always best-placed to work with residents in ways that will lead to meaningful change. We can do more if we work together, acknowledging both the expertise of the sector and its reach and connection to communities, and ensuring that they are fairly compensated for this. We will ensure that power is shared, recognising the sector's role as an important and equal partner in delivering services and although there are times where regulations may hinder our work, recognise that we should seek solutions together.

Sustainability - of environments and communities

We all value our environment, our green spaces and our community infrastructure, which have never been more important, with the pressure on public and sector services being higher. We want to improve parks and green spaces in partnership with our communities, ensuring we build climate resilience together and protect the natural environment. We will work together to ensure community and social infrastructure supports development in the borough, developing high quality neighbourhoods that are responsive to the changing needs of residents.

Evaluation and cultural change

We will value our relationships and the efforts that go into building programmes and services together, by recognising and acknowledging this alongside outputs and outcomes in delivery. We will continue to design inclusive evaluation approaches together, and make space for more regular, structured conversations about our shared work. We acknowledge our limitations and act to improve trust by embracing honest and open communication. We will celebrate our successes together and take the time to do this in meaningful ways.

What actions will we take?

Stabilise

Actions focused on improving current systems and practices

Together we will;

Create regular storytelling and learning spaces

- To act as a space to discuss 'what's working'
- Collect and share data, stories and feedback widely
- To celebrate and embed a learning culture

Improve clarity and accessibility

- Audit and redesign key council service web pages, with user input
- Map and share VCFSE contributions, in partnership with the sector
- Improve access to tools and reduce the need for time consuming queries
- Use data responsibly and in line with data handling policies

Develop a shared platform or newsletter to highlight VCFSE sector work

- We will co-create a way to engage with each other that highlights project work, cross sector partnerships and the benefits of working with the VCFSE e.g. through BDCollective CBS Discourse platform.
- Measure engagement metrics, cross sector awareness and shared learning together

Innovate

Actions to bridge the present and future, testing new ideas and improving collaboration

Together we will;

Pilot shared decision-making with residents

- By committing, where possible, to co-design projects with residents and VCFSE sector together
- By measuring project outcomes together openly and in transparent ways

Develop a local procurement partnership forum

- The new procurement forum will create opportunities for roundtable discussion with the VCFSE sector on upcoming programmes

- Supply an additional governance layer, with potential contracts viewed by the VCFSE
- We will measure and track the number of joint bids received by the sector
- To encourage and stimulate learning and provide a platform for creativity, sharing and innovative approaches

Improve access to capacity building and seek to engage better with smaller VCFSE organisations

- By working together to ensure smaller organisations are supported, creating spaces for learning to occur across the sector
- By nurturing the next generation of social innovators, by continuing to invest in social enterprises, leadership, coaching and mentoring
- By using all resources at our disposal to access available funding together
- By finding ways to measure participation and growth in capacity across the sector

Embed

Embedding long-term culture and systems change

Together we will;

Drive a culture of co-production and mutual learning

- By embedding co-design principles across a wider range of initiatives
- By collecting feedback from programmes, and distributing this through an agreed platform, to ensure that all organisations are able to learn from delivery
- By supporting the development of the BDCollective CBS model through the social infrastructure contract

Engage meaningfully

- By developing a borough engagement approach e.g. Engagement Charter
- We will develop meaningful, organisational relationships, with less reliance on historic work or existing partnerships and more reliance on structures, networks and co-designed process

Support innovation and equitable decision-making

- By ensuring council funding decisions are communicated to the sector and processes are fair, open and transparent
- By creating a culture of openness and sharing, where all organisations are encouraged to participate in sharing their expertise and learning in tangible ways e.g. through Discourse and in BDCollective CBS Networks
- We will establish a '*collaborative commissioning group*', an equal partnership of Council and VCFSE groups to guide commissioning practice
- By continuing to invest resources appropriately, making evidence-based decisions collectively

Develop a dispute resolution process

- To help resolve issues and barriers at the earliest possible points, without escalation

- To ensure fairness in our process and that there are no power imbalances

Glossary of terms

Borough Manifesto – The Borough Manifesto is a vision for the future of Barking & Dagenham to 2030. We report on our progress towards that vision every year, with a list of immediate priorities to be tackled in each following year and it informs the strategic direction of the council.

Capacity building – This means making sure that individuals, groups and communities have access to the knowledge, skills and resources they need to act or work efficiently and effectively.

Community group – Community groups are formed to pursue common interests, meet a shared need or campaign for a common cause. Most are run entirely by volunteers and will be run by their members or a committee elected from members. Community Groups can be formal or informal.

Coproduction - Refers to a way of working where service providers and users work together to reach a collective outcome.

Governance – This describes the way an organisation is managed, including its powers, responsibilities and decision- making processes. This is often set out in an organisation's constitution or legal identity.

Infrastructure bodies – These are organisations that provide capacity building support to voluntary and community organisations. They represent the sector when making policies. They also encourage joint working across sectors.

Mediation – This is a way of solving disagreements where an unbiased third party (the mediator) helps people who disagree to find an acceptable solution.

Quality Assurance (QA) – These are steps taken to make sure that an organisation's activities are of a high quality.

Service Agreement Contracts – This is a formal negotiated agreement setting out the making processes. This is often set out in an organisation's constitution or legal identity.

Social Enterprises – These are organisations with objectives that benefit the community (for example, recycling). They reinvest any surplus to achieve these objectives, or invest it in the community rather than distribute it as profit to shareholders and owners.

Compact Stakeholders – These are people who have an interest in an organisation, its activities and its achievements.

Umbrella Body – This is an organisation that supports other organisations working in a particular area or field.

Voluntary Organisation – This is a formal non-profit-distributing and non-statutory organisation, usually set up as a charity, which aims to provide a service or meet a need that will benefit the public. Voluntary organisations often have paid employees.

Other useful information

Participation and Engagement Team

- Email: community@lbbd.gov.uk

BDGiving

- Website: bdgiving.org.uk/contact
- Email: hello@bdgiving.org.uk
- Phone: 020 8227 3205
- Address: 50 Cambridge Road, Barking, Essex IG11

BDCollective

- Website: bdgiving.org.uk/contact
- Online Platform: <https://discourse.bdcollective.co.uk/>
- Email: hello@bdgiving.org.uk
- Phone: 020 8227 3205
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BDCVS

- Website: bdcvs.org.uk/contact-us
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- Trustees Email: trustees@bdcvs.org.uk
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