

CIVIL SOCIETY SUPPORT STRATEGY 2022-25
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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 SHG has social objectives far wider than just being a social housing provider, with a mission of 'One Team, Transforming Lives'. As part of this, a commitment to working with local groups to secure grant funding has been in place since the recruitment of a Funding Officer in 2011.

1.2 Over the past ten years, this has evolved from a focus on the work of the Funding Officer to a broader strategic approach to supporting Civil Society through strong partnerships. This Civil Society Support Strategy sets out how the Group, principally via SHL and Foundations, will work with the Council, funders and infrastructure organisation Sector3 to support local Civil Society groups to:

- Continue to attract inward investment, grants and other resources
- Build their skills and sustainability
- Build partnerships which deliver in and benefit our neighbourhoods
- Work closely with 'One Stockport', Sector3 on post-Covid recovery in the short, medium and long term
- Raise the profile of Stockport groups to compete for national grant awards

2 CONTEXT

2.1 National Context

Covid-19 has highlighted considerable inequalities in how people have been affected by the pandemic, not only as regards health but also the economic, social and psychological impacts¹. In absolute terms, greater levels of poverty are expected for some of the poorest people in society, including those claiming benefits and working households on low incomes and potentially claiming in work benefits. Universal Credit was reduced on 4th October 2021; the allowance for a single person aged under 25 fell back from £79 a week to £59 resulting in households seeing benefits at the lowest level since 1990 (Resolution Foundation)².

Demand for services has consequently dramatically increased. Food and other essentials, as well as mental health issues, debt, and homelessness are all areas where need is increasing³ but many funders have had to suspend or change their grant programmes. In many cases grants were provided only to projects which had Covid specific activities and outcomes. When combined with the impact on other income streams, particularly trading and community fundraising, many charities start the year with dwindling reserves. Job losses

¹ NCVO The Road Ahead 2021

² Resolution Foundation data 2021

³ NCVO The Road Ahead 2021

and closures, already a feature of the sector, are set to continue and many are facing a cliff-edge as emergency Covid-19 funding finishes⁴.

2.2 Regional Context

Civil Society in Greater Manchester comprises 17,494 voluntary organisations⁵, community groups and social enterprises, an increase on the 15,890 identified in 2017.⁶ 71% are micro-organisations with an income under £10,000 per year and are run by volunteers. 19% identify themselves as social enterprises.

The Greater Manchester Model⁷ identifies that Civil Society has a central role to play in the reform and delivery of public services and has been created in the context of the Greater Manchester Strategy 'Our People, Our Place, the GM Health and Social Care Prospectus and the GM Industrial Strategy'.

"We want to collaborate, as one public service, on prevention rather than individually picking up the pieces. We want to be proactive rather than reactive. We want to promote a model of public service delivery that is truly preventative and person-centred".
(GM Mayor, Andy Burnham).

Greater Manchester Council for Voluntary Organisations GMCVO are the umbrella body representing Civil Society groups across Greater Manchester. GMCVO also acts as a voice for Greater Manchester Civil Society at a regional and national level with government and business. GMCVO also make regional funding bids with the support of the Council for Voluntary Services (CVS), local authorities and Civil Society organisations across the ten local authority areas. SHG works closely with Greater Manchester Council for Voluntary Organisations (GMCVO).

2.3 Stockport Context

2.3.1 Civil Society in Stockport comprises 1,672 voluntary organisations⁸, community groups and social enterprises, a very small decrease on the 1,689 identified in 2017.⁹ 77% are micro-organisations with an income under £10,000 per year and are run by volunteers. 11% identify themselves as social enterprises.

⁴ NCVO The Road Ahead 2021

⁵ GM VCSE State of the Sector 2021 (GMCVO, 10GM, University of Salford)

⁶ GM VCSE State of the Sector 2017 (GMCVO, 10GM)

⁷ The Greater Manchester Model; Further, Faster reforming public services, GMCA, 2021.

⁸ Stockport VCSE State of the Sector 2021 (GMCVO, 10GM, University of Salford)

⁹ Stockport VCSE State of the Sector 2017 (GMCVO, 10GM)

Civil Society groups were asked what area of work they identify with. These were the top four responses (the same group may identify as providing one or more of these) given in the 2021 Stockport State of the Sector¹⁰ report:

- Wellbeing, Health and Social Care (23%)
- Economic Wellbeing (22%)
- Physical Activity, Sport and Leisure (24%)
- Community Development (46%)

Civil Society groups in Stockport (like other GM areas) identified the following challenges created by the current economic, political and health factors:

- Loss of funding
- A move to digital only provision
- Increase in demand for their services

The 'One Stockport' Borough Plan sets out a vision for the borough for 2030: continuing to create a place that works for everyone – businesses, residents, community organisations and charities. The Plan has three areas of focus:

- One Heart (caring and growing, healthy and happy, strong and supportive)
- One Home (fair and inclusive, flourishing and creative, climate friendly)
- One Future (enterprising and thriving, skilled and confident, radically digital)

2.3.2 The Civil Society Support Strategy makes a direct contribution to both the One Stockport priorities and Civil Society challenges through a range of support. This ranges from one-to-one work with community groups, providing them with the tools, funding intelligence to plan, bid and bring funding into Stockport to deliver a range of projects, to close collaboration with statutory and Civil Society partners to maximise the amount and focus of grant funding brought into the Borough.

SHG is unique in its use of the 'LIFE' process, which facilitates local Civil Society groups (whose membership is primarily SHG customers) to access funding grants through provision of information, funding bid development and personal introductions to funders based on an assessment of groups' needs and development stage.

Since the first Strategy was developed in 2012, Stockport Homes has enabled Civil Society groups to:

- Make 604 funding bids
- Receive £3,165,065 in grants

¹⁰ Stockport VCSE State of the Sector 2021 (GMCVO, 10GM, University of Salford)

- Attracted £3,212,233 match funding

Since 2019, a close working relationship has been developed with Sector3, established to support Stockport Civil Society groups. Direct assistance is provided for Sector3 in terms of funding searches, bid writing and events. SHG also takes the lead in delivering online and in person events for Stockport Civil Society. This includes 'Funding the Future', where grassroots groups can meet potential funders face to face. Foundations' branded funding conferences and online events are also organised with national and local funders for Civil Society groups.

- 2.3.3 The Civil Society Support Strategy 2022-25 has been developed following consultation¹¹ during summer 2021 with customers, local Civil Society groups, Stockport Council staff, including feedback from events, one to one work on bid development and enquiries for help. Consultation has also taken place with SHG staff across a wide range of teams.

Themes from the consultation included:

- At a strategic level, partner agencies such as the Council and Sector3 value local intelligence work coordinated by SHG, enabling active Stockport funders to share information, coordinate their funds and ensure groups receive the support that they need.
- Civil Society groups value the expertise of SHG, which includes funding searches, long-term engagement in their group development and in particular events organised by Foundations. These bring them face to face with the people who work for local and national funders, rather than a website.
- SHG staff have identified bottlenecks facing Foundations' food and furniture projects and these present opportunities for several capital and revenue grant bids for vehicles, buildings and staff.
- Civil Society organisations and staff from the Independent Living Team both identified a continuing need to work with older people living in sheltered housing as well as those living independently to develop inclusive, fun digital inclusion and social projects together.

SHG has many long-established relationships with civil society groups, ranging from formal partnerships (for example The Prevention Alliance (TPA) and Wellness & Independence Network (WIN)) to funding work and two-way signposting with smaller community groups. Further opportunities to work together are continuously explored for mutual benefit. A review was undertaken during 2021 of all the Civil Society groups with whom SHG has had a relationship, to identify opportunities for closer working with specific groups and organisations to mutual benefit. Whilst the original list comprised almost 1,000 groups, this exercise led to a final list of 22 partners where further communication is taking place to build stronger relationships.

¹¹ Consultation took place with 10 customer groups and 28 staff from each SHG Directorate

3.0 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES & OUTCOMES

The new Objectives for this Strategy are set out below and in more detail from section 3. They contribute to Stockport Homes' mission of 'Transforming Lives'; to the Social Investment Strategy by providing information and tools to local people to enable them to make successful grant funding bids to 'do good and make a difference' in local neighbourhoods, and to the Business Development Strategy which has a broad range of objectives including increasing income through funding, tendering, commissioning and development of new products and services. The Strategy will continue to evolve to meet the changing needs of Civil Society and to complement the priorities of key partners.

The objectives are to:

- Ensure funding enhances the delivery of a strong employment and skills offer
- Secure funding which increases young people's aspirations and achievements
- Enhance positive personal, physical and mental wellbeing in communities
- Make a direct contribution to improving financial wellbeing through timely interventions
- Advance the growth of a strong Civil Society sector in Stockport
- Contribute to the development of new business for SHG and particularly in relation to meeting the aims of Foundations community benefit society

3.1 Objective One: Ensure funding enhances the delivery of a strong employment and skills offer

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic and the Greater Manchester Work and Skills Strategy, priority areas around employment and skills will be:

- Young people, as they have been disproportionately impacted by the recent economic downturn.
- Over 50s: who were in well-paid, long-term employment, and have unexpectedly found themselves out of work due to the pandemic.
- Enhancing digital skills, as these have a significant impact on access to better paid employment opportunities, as well as offering financial benefits from many 'internet only' services and deals.

Objective One actions:

- Make a significant contribution to securing funding for regional employment initiatives through active participation in the Greater Manchester Athena partnership
- Maximise external funding to increase the number of local people entering training, volunteering and employment.
- Provide information on funding available to individuals (rather than groups) for education, training, interviews and job orientation.
- Work with SHG Employment Team and B4Box to raise their national profile and obtain funding, including enabling new staff recruited through Kickstart¹² and other programmes to apply for clothing and tools of the trade.
- Obtain funding for Foundations' work with ex-offenders.
- Work with Civil Society groups to benefit from the Council's 'Digi know' programme via external funding bids for a range of digital inclusion projects.

3.2 Objective Two: Secure funding which increases young people's aspirations and achievements

Many young people living in SHG neighbourhoods face challenges to achieving their true potential, starting school without the necessary skills to thrive, attaining less well at school than their more affluent peers and having low aspirations for their future. Their life chances can therefore be constrained from an early age if effective interventions are not put in place.

Whilst recognising more specialist partners such as Stockport Family may take the lead in addressing some of these issues, SHG has a vested interest in ensuring these young people make positive choices and thrive within their communities. Delivery of these actions should lead to increased attainment at school, although it is difficult to attribute this specifically to SHG interventions.

Objective Two actions:

- Contribute to larger strategic bids with Stockport Council and others for projects for example the EPEC (Empowering People, Empowering Communities) parenting initiative
- Work with Civil Society groups delivering youth projects which start with the younger person but impact the wider family. For example, Heaton Norris and Why Sports Youth, elderly and food aid projects.
- Secure external funding to secure and expand SHG's staff resources available for youth work, including school holiday, youth diversion and detached youth outreach projects.

¹² The Kickstart Scheme is a HM Government project which provides funding to employers to create jobs for 16 to 24 year olds on Universal Credit.

3.3 Objective Three: Enhance positive physical and mental health and wellbeing in communities

SHG is committed to playing a greater role in reducing the Borough's health inequalities. Having regular access to households experiencing some of the poorest health outcomes in the borough puts SHG in a unique position to work with its health partners to improve life expectancy and reduce health inequalities, as well as sustaining tenancies and building communities. SHG will pursue this goal by securing external funding for health initiatives which align with wider Borough priorities.

Objective Three actions:

- Increase positive mental health through securing funding for specialist counselling and resilience, working with partner agencies such as local social enterprise HEART and regional charity TLC.
- Collaborate with Stockport Family and other key partners to obtain funding for projects which benefit family groups, parents/carers and their children.
- Ensure Stockport benefits from national, regional and local funding to support homeless customers with a range of activities and skills.
- Work in partnership with Stockport Council colleagues to access funding to improve existing, and develop new open spaces, outdoors gyms and playgrounds.
- Obtain funding for the places that matter to communities, including the local community centres managed by SHG.
- Enhance local health services by engaging with civil society groups closely linked to the NHS to gain external funding.

3.4 Objective Four: Make a direct contribution to improving financial wellbeing through timely interventions

Many SHG customers experiencing financial difficulties are helped through a flexible offer including money advice, furniture packages, energy advice and affordable food. Demand for these services has seen a significant increase linked to the rising cost of living, in particular costs of food and energy. Whilst a small number of households could be described as experiencing extreme poverty, requiring significant input such as gifted furniture and food bank referrals, most are able to contribute towards the support either financially or through taking certain actions themselves. This objective aims to encourage self-help where possible, to reduce dependency and increase resilience, enabling more resources to be directed towards those in most need.

Objective Four actions:

- Obtain funding to strengthen and diversify the Your Local Pantry network in partnership with local communities, responding to local needs and piloting new models of delivery such as plastic free pantry, the mobile pantry and dedicated allotment or growing space.
- Enable the development and obtain funding for YLP to create a robust local food infrastructure organisation to complement or provide an alternative to 'Fareshare' to enable YLP to better manage the peaks and troughs of food donation delivery.
- Work in partnership with Stockport Credit Union to secure funding which enables customers to access affordable credit and accumulate savings, facilitating self-help in times of financial crisis.
- Deliver GM Digital Taskforce pilot project to engage Internet Service Providers in funding affordable connectivity, devices and skills, with a particular focus on older people and those with disabilities

3.5 Objective Five: Advance the growth of a strong Civil Society sector in Stockport

"We have an enterprising, adaptable and responsive VCSE sector in Greater Manchester, However, we must not assume that it is indestructible. Before and during the pandemic, communities expended a vast amount of energy, resources and love in order to support those of us who have needed help. We will need to rebuild and strengthen in order to face the challenges we will inevitably face in the future and to be there when the next crisis hits."

(John Hannon, incoming Chief Executive of GMCVO).

Just as the state and the private sector require access to finance, physical infrastructure such as roads and digital infrastructure to thrive; so does the Civil Society sector. This includes bodies to represent them and give them a local, regional and national voice, to provide training, support and transfer of knowledge.

Stockport Council, Sector3, Stockport Homes and Foundations fulfil this role by representing the sector, providing funding opportunities and knowledge, and by creating events such as 'Funding the Future' where people can meet national and local funders face-to-face or online.

Objective Five actions:

- Collaborate with Sector3 to achieve a stronger, more resilient Civil Society in Stockport.
- Use outcomes from Civil Society mapping exercise to focus relationship building on key partners for mutual benefit

- Work with other organisations including Sector 3, Stockport Council, Sector Connector, GMCVO and other relevant groups to provide comprehensive information, training and events for Civil Society in Stockport.
- Use the LIFE process to strengthen Civil Society groups (with an emphasis on underrepresented BAME groups) including access SHG, Foundations and Council funding.
- Raise the profile of Stockport with funders and develop working relationships through local intelligence meetings with key funders.
- Use local intelligence meetings with funders to capture data about groups and those projects which are related to age, gender, ethnicity, disability and the wider LGBTQ+ community. Use this data to plan, monitor and manage a programme of support for these groups.
- Develop a user guide for LIFE to enable staff use a standard approach to working with Civil Society groups.

3.6 Objective Six: Contribute to the development of new business for SHG and particularly in relation to meeting the aims of Foundations community benefit society.

The Civil Society Support Strategy is primarily concerned with grant funding. It is distinct from the Business Development Strategy which is primarily concerned with commissions and tenders:

- Grants are usually offered by funders (who have broad fields or themes they want to fund) in response to “cold” speculative applications made by Civil Society groups – where the applicants tell the funder what the applicant wants to do, usually an innovative solution or an experimental pilot project.
- A tender or commission opportunity will usually involve a prequalification process and a tender stage where the client will set out in detail the service or product that they want an applicant to supply.

The Civil Society Support Strategy identifies that there is potential for considerable joint working through “teams around the tender or grant”.

Objective Six actions:

- Ensure all Civil Society Support Strategy activities are delivered in compliance with relevant Business Development procedures from opportunity identification to approval to release a bid to a funder.
- Contribute to projects and partnerships across SHG and Foundations Stockport which aim to bring external grant and other resources into the Borough.
- Provide intelligence on funders and partners to support Business Development and explore funding streams that complement tendering and procurement, for example match funding.
- Assist with delivery of Foundations Business Plan

- Secure funding to develop projects which address the aims of Foundations

4 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT (EIA)

4.1 An EIA has been undertaken, as the Strategy directly impacts on both customers and SHG staff. Much of the work identified will enhance equality and inclusion. The EIA highlighted the need to ensure the Strategy supports equality of opportunity, specifically for the following groups:

- Age – work with older and younger customers to identify projects which also have secondary impacts, e.g. older people may face social and educational barriers regarding the use and access to computer technology; but this is often coupled with physical and age related disabilities such as hearing or sight loss.
- Ethnicity – actively seek opportunities to work with members of Stockport Housing Partnership providing specialist BAME housing, and local groups supporting BAME communities.
- Gender – work with family groups which support parents/carers and their children.
- Disability - actively seek opportunities to help organisations which work with customers with disabilities.
- LGBTQ+ actively seek opportunities to assist groups which work with the LGBTQ+ community and the network groups which promote and raise their profile, such as Forward Stockport and PROUD Stockport.

4.2 Work with Sector 3 as part of local intelligence meetings will be used to capture all relevant data from grant bids and local groups in relation to the above categories. Data from these sources will be used to plan, monitor and manage the nature of the relationship with these groups as required.

5 LINKS TO POLICIES AND STRATEGIES

5.1 This Strategy links to several other SHG Strategies and Policies:

- Social Investment Strategy
- Community Buildings Strategy
- Customer Access Strategy
- People & OD Strategy
- Business Development Strategy
- Customer Voice & Influence Strategy
- Delivery Plan
- Equality and Diversity Strategy
- Marketing and Communications Strategy

- Value for Money Strategy
- Age Friendly Strategy
- Greenspace Strategy

5.2 It is also linked to Stockport Council Strategies around Place Based Integration, Local Plans, and All Age Living.

6 ACTION PLAN

6.1 Please see Appendix 2 for action plan.

7 OWNERSHIP, MONITORING & REVIEW

7.1 The Strategy will be monitored by Head of Customer Engagement & Inclusion. Strategy indicators and project summaries will be reported regularly to SHL and Foundations Board.

7.2 The following indicators will be used to measure the progress and effectiveness of the Civil Society Support Strategy:

- Number and value of funding applications submitted in the year
- £350,000 Grant secured (per year), broken down into:
 - SHL
 - Foundations
 - Wider Civil Society in Stockport
 - Total of local grant (i.e. grants only awarded within the Stockport Borough)
 - Total of external (i.e. national and regional grants)
- £350,000 Match funding attracted from grant bids (per year)
- Number of funding searches completed
- Number of groups attending funding support sessions
- Number of funders attending funding support sessions
- Contributions to civil society through social value commitments in contracts
- Value of partnership bids secured/awarded with Civil Society partners, e.g. TPA, Help@Home.

Work is progressing with GM partners to develop common measures for social value commitments and to embed these in SHG's procurement framework. These will include financial commitments and funding in kind through donations of staff time etc. It is anticipated these will be approved and in use from November 2022.

Appendix 1 – LIFE

LIFE is a formal process of Lead, Influence, Follow and Exit. It will be used by SHG and others to enable Civil Society groups to learn, grow and develop. Groups may enter LIFE at any stage and work their way through the different levels of support and eventually become more self-reliant.

- **Lead** - Stockport Homes' customers will receive extensive input at the 'Lead' level which includes regular contact to ensure they can access all appropriate funding. This can include working one to one with partners to write a detailed bid, develop effective consultation for a project and ensure suitable Governance arrangements are in place to satisfy funder requirements.
- **Influence** - Experienced groups and those moving on from the 'Lead' stage will be offered a lower level of assistance, for example, encouragement to bid for funds and sharing of successful bids. The group will be expected to write the bid themselves. 'Critical friend' support can be provided in reading and editing bids before they are submitted.
- **Follow** - The 'Follow' stage includes sophisticated new groups or those groups who have progressed through Lead and Influence. These groups may be initiating and leading their own funding bids, which SHG may want to engage with as a partner.
- **Exit** - 'Exit' represents the final stage. Some groups will contact SHG for advice, but it will be clear that there is no strategic fit with SHG's objectives, nor an impact on SHG neighbourhoods. In these cases, the contribution would be limited to a funding search and contact would cease. Other groups may have completed their journey through LIFE and no longer need SHG's input as they are self-sufficient.

There is a further informal stage to Exit. Groups who have taken a journey through LIFE are encouraged to share their experience and story as 'peer mentors' to the advantage of other aspiring communities' groups.