

Policy Committee

16 September 2026



Reading
Borough Council
Working better with you

Title	Voluntary & Community Sector Partnership Agreement 2026-29
Purpose of the report	To make a decision
Report status	Public report
Executive Director/ Statutory Officer Commissioning Report	Louise Duffield, Executive Director of Resources
Report author	Mark Redfearn, Social Inclusion & VCS Partnerships Manager
Lead Councillor	Liz Terry, Leader of the Council / Ruth McEwan, Lead Councillor for Corporate Services & Resources
Council priority	Promote more equal communities in Reading
Recommendations	1. That the Committee approves the VCS Partnership Agreement document presented in Appendix 1. 2. That the Committee receives updates on the Partnership Agreement action plan at future meetings.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 Reading continues to have a vibrant, effective, and committed voluntary and community sector. The Council along with the many and varied groups and organisations that make up the voluntary and community sector have the same broad ambitions of improving the quality of life for the residents and communities of Reading.
- 1.2 In 2023, following an independent review of the working relationship between the Council and the voluntary and community sector, a new Compact agreement was co-produced by the Council and many of the voluntary and community sector organisations from across the borough. This was the first Compact agreement in over 10 years to be agreed by the Council and the local voluntary and community sector.
- 1.3 The aim of the Compact was to create and embed mechanisms that ensure our work to improve the lives of our residents and communities is effectively joined up, that our complementary efforts are targeted where they can add most value and that each partner organisation supports the other as much as it can.
- 1.4 To ensure its relevance to the current working relationship between the Council and the local Voluntary and Community Sector, the Compact document has been reviewed and a new 'Partnership Agreement' document has been co-produced with the sector.
- 1.5 The new Partnership Agreement reflects the successes of the previous Compact agreement and action plan, the learning from collaborative working between the Council and the local VCS and incorporates the principles of the new Civil Society Covenant introduced by Government in 2025.

2. Policy Context

- 2.1 The Council's vision is to help promote more equal communities within Reading, helping our residents to realise their potential and to ensure that everyone who lives and works here can share the benefits of Reading's success.
- 2.2 Our foundations which, underpin our delivery of our vision, includes collaborating with others. We are stronger in partnership, and we collaborate with organisations from major corporations to local groups; with the business sector, charities, education institutions, health and social care, the police, faith groups, and the voluntary sector in Reading and across the Thames Valley to achieve our vision for Reading.
- 2.3 Reading has a vibrant, effective, and committed voluntary and community sector. Among the sector's many positive impacts supporting residents and enhancing the town's cultural opportunities, it makes a significant contribution to social inclusion and community cohesion in Reading.
- 2.4 Although the Council and the groups and organisations in the voluntary and community sector are separate, there is a long history of working together in partnership for the benefit of our residents and the Council respects and values the independence of the sector.
- 2.5 This new Partnership Agreement between the Council and Reading's voluntary and community sector sets out the basis for strategic engagement, partnership working and collaboration to deliver our shared ambition of improving the quality of life for all residents and communities of Reading.
- 2.6 The Partnership Agreement incorporates the principles of the new Civil Society Covenant introduced by Government in 2025.

3. VCS Compact Achievements

- 3.1 The Partnership Agreement builds on the successful delivery of the objectives and actions within the previous Reading VCS Compact agreement. Between 2023 and 2025 some notable deliverables include:
 - Six monthly meetings between VCS infrastructure support organisations and the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive to discuss important issues for the sector;
 - During the lifespan of the Compact, the Council has provided over £475,000 to local grassroots VCS organisations via its Small Grants Fund;
 - Reading Voluntary Action have completed a comprehensive 'State of the Sector' survey which has been used to inform the commissioning of services to support the local VCS;
 - Monthly VCS Intelligence Network meetings have been held to keep the VCS informed of Council activities, and to provide an opportunity for the VCS to feedback their views;
 - Over 20 local VCS organisations have been given access to support from the Council's Employee Assistance Programme;
 - A new 'accommodation request process' has been introduced to help local VCS organisations enquire about surplus Council accommodation that may be available to use;
 - Extensive engagement has been conducted with the VCS on commissioning activities, including the £1.4M p.a. Closing the Gap services;

- An analysis of the Council's spend shows that approx. £14M p.a. has been spent on VCS organisations – including £7M on Health and Social Care, £3M on Housing and Homelessness, £1.5M on Tackling Inequalities, and just under £1M on Community Safety;
 - Within this, in 2025/26, the Council provided £717,801 in grant funding to the local VCS, including £125,000 in Small Grants funding to 30 local VCS organisations;
 - The Council has maintained its Reading4Community funding portal with 329 registered users, so that local VCS organisations can search for available funding opportunities;
 - Many VCS organisations have provided Cost-of-Living support to over 8,000 low-income via the Household Support Fund;
 - The Council maintains a dedicated resource for VCS organisations on its RBC website;
 - There is a single point of contact within the Council to aid communication between VCS organisations and the Council;
 - The Council continues to offer all its employees the opportunity to take two days paid leave to volunteer within the borough;
 - The Council has updated its Asset Disposal Policy to make it clearer for VCS organisations to bid for surplus Council assets.
- 3.2 Given these achievements, there is a strong willingness from both the Council and the VCS to continue to maintain and, where possible, improve how we work together to provide services and activities that enable our residents to enjoy a positive quality of life.

4. Reading VCS Partnership Agreement

- 4.1 The Partnership Agreement has been jointly developed by the Council and Reading Voluntary Action (RVA) who are the main VCS infrastructure support organisation within the borough, which includes the delivery of activities specifically commissioned by the Council. RVA and the Council have engaged and consulted a broad range of local Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations in the development of this Agreement to ensure it reflects sector priorities and perspectives.
- 4.2 The draft Agreement in Appendix 1 sets out the shared expectations, values and ways of working that will guide partnership collaboration between the Council and the wider VCS in Reading.
- 4.3 The VCS and the Council understand that they will not always agree, and that the Council may have to balance competing factors and priorities in making its decisions.
- 4.4 The Council wants Reading to have a healthy and self-sustaining voluntary and community sector, so that it can continue to play a positive role in supporting the quality of life for our residents.

Purpose of the Partnership Agreement

- 4.5 The Partnership Agreement is a reciprocal arrangement recognising that both the VCS and the Council have distinct and shared roles in serving the public.
- 4.6 The Partnership Agreement fosters an environment in which the VCS is respected, supported and listened to by the Council when working in partnership and independently when speaking on behalf of their beneficiaries.

- 4.7 In turn, the Partnership Agreement recognises the ongoing demand pressures and financial constraints that the Council operates within, and its need to prioritise its resources on meeting its statutory requirements and delivering the vision and priorities set out in its Council Plan.
- 4.8 The Reading Partnership Agreement aligns with the four core principles of the Civil Society Covenant:
- **Recognition and value:** The Partnership Agreement fosters solid relationships and strengthens sector independence by promoting respect and value for the Council's and the voluntary sector's respective strengths, responsibilities, perspectives and constraints.
 - **Partnership and collaboration:** The Partnership Agreement encourages high quality, purposeful, collaborative working between the Council and the VCS to inform decision-making and service design, delivering better solutions for all.
 - **Participation and inclusion:** The Partnership Agreement provides greater opportunities for people to influence decisions and activities affecting their lives by enabling increased involvement and representation.
 - **Transparency and data:** The Partnership Agreement champions more open sharing of information and data through better availability, understanding of need and evidence-based solutions.

Partnership Agreement Action Plan

- 4.9 The practical commitment to the Partnership Agreement by the Council and the VCS is reflected in the Partnership Agreement Action Plan. The Action Plan includes details of existing activities which will continue to support the objectives of the Partnership Agreement, and new activities which will enhance them. The Partnership Agreement will be monitored by the Council through its Social Inclusion Board, and by the VCS at its VCS Intelligence Network meetings.

5. Contribution to Strategic Aims

- 5.1 A strong voluntary and community sector is central to Reading being a place where its local communities can thrive and make our town an exciting and diverse place to live and work. The Council's aspiration is that this spirit of inclusivity and community is carried into every aspect of life in Reading, wherever people live and whatever their stage of life.
- 5.2 Voluntary and community services are often focused on the needs of the most vulnerable and excluded in our communities, ensuring young people, older people and those with long term health conditions or disabilities are supported to live their best lives.
- 5.3 This is why the Council Plan prioritises promoting more equal communities within Reading and tackling social and economic inequalities in partnership with the voluntary and community sector.
- 5.4 The delivery of the Partnership Agreement Action Plan, is a specifically stated project within the Council Plan.

6. Environmental and Climate Implications

- 6.1 The local VCS is one of many groups of partners that the Council will work with to deliver the Climate Strategy for 2025 to 2030 to achieve a net zero Reading resilient to climate change.

- 6.2 The commitments to reciprocal working to meet our objectives for improving the quality of life of our residents means that the local VCS will continue to play an active and important role in delivering sustained environmental change within the borough.

7. Community Engagement

- 7.1 In developing this Partnership Agreement document, Council officers have engaged directly with a wide range of local organisations, both collectively and individually to understand their views on working with the Council and how this relationship can improve to support their own organisational purpose and the support provided to Reading residents. This included three separate workshops and direct engagement with the VCS Leaders Group which is run by Reading Voluntary Action.
- 7.2 Alongside specific discussions on the development of the Partnership Agreement, the Council regularly and routinely hosts opportunities for voluntary and community sector organisations to discuss issues which are of importance to them and to provide feedback or points of learning to Council officers.
- 7.3 This engagement has formed a crucial part in the development of a Partnership Agreement document and Action Plan that reflects the needs and aspirations of the joint working between the voluntary and community sector and the Council.

8. Equality Implications

- 8.1 An EQIA has been completed and reviewed. No specific concerns or additional requirements have been identified
- 8.2 The voluntary and community sector within Reading supports residents with all protected characteristics as detailed in the Equality Act 2010. By improving the working relationship between the Council and the organisations within the voluntary and community sector, the Council is enhancing the capacity available to improve the quality of life for everyone in the borough who may face challenges because of their own personal circumstances.

9. Health Implications

- 9.1. A substantial amount of joint working is done between the Council and local VCS organisations to improve the health and wellbeing of residents; therefore, this new VCS Partnership Agreement will provide a stronger basis for this important collaboration to be more successful in the future.
- 9.2. A Health in All Policies assessment is included in appendix 2

10. Other Relevant Considerations

- 10.1 Within all the commitments to work openly and collaboratively with the local VCS, there needs to be a recognition that the Council will do so whilst consistently maintaining its legal responsibilities and formally established procedures.

11. Legal Implications

- 11.1 None to note.

12. Financial Implications

- 12.1 There are no additional financial commitments within the recommendations of this report. All activities relating to the finances of the Council are already contained within the Medium-Term Financial Plan, including what is expected to be a substantial time commitment from Council staff to working with local VCS organisations.

- 12.2 It is also important to highlight the significant demand pressures, competing priorities and financial constraints that the Council must operate within, and how these should guide the expectations of the VCS about what capacity the Council has to directly support its operations.

13. Timetable for Implementation

- 13.1 The activities relating to the Partnership Agreement set out in the Action Plan will subject to approval of this report, be delivered between 2026 and 2029.

14. Background Papers

There are none.

Appendices

1. Reading VCS Partnership Agreement 2026 to 2029 & Action Plan
2. Health in All Policies Assessment

Appendix 1: Reading VCS Partnership Agreement 2026 - 2029

Voluntary and Community Sector Partnership Agreement 2026-29

The Partnership Agreement has been jointly developed by the Council and Reading Voluntary Action (RVA) who are the main VCS infrastructure support organisation within the borough, the services they provide includes the delivery of activities specifically commissioned by the Council.

RVA and the Council have engaged and consulted a broad range of local Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations in the development of this agreement to ensure it reflects sector priorities and perspectives.

This document sets out the shared expectations, values and ways of working that will guide partnership collaboration between the Council and the wider VCS in Reading.

Statement of Intent

We recognise that achieving better outcomes for Residents will be more successful by working effectively in partnership. This Agreement is our commitment to this partnership.

This Partnership Agreement sets out the basis for strategic engagement, partnership working and collaboration between the Council and Reading's voluntary and community sector to deliver our shared ambition of improving the quality of life for the residents and communities of Reading.

This Agreement aligns with the principles of the national Civil Society Covenant (October 2025), providing a specific framework for partnership working.

Purpose of the Partnership Agreement

The Partnership Agreement fosters an environment in which the VCS is respected, supported and listened to by the Council when working in partnership and independently when speaking on behalf of their beneficiaries.

In turn, the Partnership Agreement recognises the ongoing demand pressures, competing priorities and financial constraints that the Council operates within, and its need to prioritise its resources on meeting its statutory requirements and its vision, priorities and objectives as set out within the Council Plan.

The Partnership Agreement is a reciprocal arrangement recognising that the VCS and the Council have both separate and shared roles in serving the public.

This Agreement aligns with the aims and values of the Civil Society Covenant to deliver:

- a fair, just and equitable society with improvements to people's lives.
- a strong, sustainable and independent VCS which collaborates with the local authority for the benefit of Reading residents.
- resilient, connected and empowered communities with inclusive opportunities for participation which strengthen our social fabric.
- decision-making informed by VCS insight, expertise and constructive challenge.
- innovative long-term problem solving to benefit local people.
- a strong democracy where all people can participate and where all voices are heard.

The values and behaviours required to achieve the aims:

- **understanding** - demonstrating understanding of the challenges and pressures faced by all parties, respecting each other's roles and responsibilities.
- **flexibility** - demonstrating ability to adapt to changing circumstances and adjust ways of working, to innovate and include different types of organisations.
- **mutual learning** - working together to ensure all parties can be open about what has worked well and what needs to improve.
- **trust** - creating mutual trust by investing in relationships that recognise goodwill and build a shared purpose, communicating regularly, honestly and openly, acting with integrity and honouring commitments.
- **openness** - maintaining open channels of communication and respect, agreeing to disagree where necessary and seeking to resolve tensions without undermining collaboration.
- **diversity, equality and inclusion** - promoting rights and responsibilities in how we work with each other and with communities, ensuring equity of access wherever possible.

The Reading Partnership Agreement aligns with the principles of the Civil Society Covenant:

1. Recognition and value

The Partnership Agreement builds solid relationships and strengthens sector independence by promoting respect and value for the Council's and voluntary sector's respective strengths, responsibilities, perspectives and constraints.

Respect for independence and legitimacy

The Council respects the independence and legitimacy of VCS organisations to advocate and campaign, including protecting the right to engage in peaceful protest.

The Reading VCS respects the legitimacy of the Council to make decisions and its accountability to Government, as well as understanding the demand pressures and financial constraints that it operates within.

The Council does not treat VCS organisations which have constructively expressed disagreement with policies or decisions any less favourably by excluding them from strategic discussions or funding opportunities.

Recognition of value, role and different perspectives

The Council recognises and values the economic and social contributions of the VCS, including the inherent community benefit VCS organisations bring, and their ability to build cohesive, inclusive communities.

The VCS recognises that Reading Councillors are democratically elected and have formal accountability to the public as leaders.

The Council values VCS expertise when shaping policy and designing services. Areas of expertise may include trusted relationships with residents, deep knowledge about what works, community leadership and building, social business, and service delivery.

Understanding responsibilities and constraints

The Council and the VCS understand each other's respective responsibilities and operational parameters under legal requirements, financial constraints, relevant regulations and ethical standards.

The Council recognises the responsibility of charities to constructively speak out when local authority policy may negatively impact their beneficiaries.

The VCS and the Council understand that they will not always agree, and that the Council may have to balance competing factors and priorities in its decisions.

2. Partnership and collaboration

The Partnership Agreement encourages high quality, purposeful, collaborative working between the Council and the VCS to inform decision-making and service design, delivering better solutions for all.

Early, regular and ongoing engagement

The Council and the VCS Leaders will work together as strategic partners to identify and develop mutual priorities to achieve shared goals.

The Council communicates strategically and effectively with the VCS through channels that are accessible, open and inclusive for effective two-way conversations.

The VCS accurately and effectively shares information to ensure that it is aware of important local issues and its role in supporting them.

The Council enables the VCS to contribute insights and expertise to define challenges, create a shared purpose and where priorities align, agree outcomes to inform relevant policy development and service design.

In making this contribution, the VCS will draw on its strengths, including its expertise in representing the interests of the people or causes it has been established to support, acting strategically by engaging early, sharing evidence, insights, and expertise wherever resources allow.

Creating the conditions for collaboration and innovation

The Council and the VCS promote a culture and environment conducive to innovation, creating opportunities for testing new ideas, focusing on impact and learning, and building on what works.

The Council and the VCS work together to prioritise preventative interventions and take a long-term view to tackle challenges and realise opportunities.

Addressing barriers to delivery in partnership

Where appropriate, the Council supports collaborative commissioning models, recognising the inherent social value the VCS brings, offering flexibility to achieve outcomes, ensuring proportionate monitoring and seeking to align funding to agreed outcomes within available resources.

All commissioning and funding activity conducted by the Council will comply with procurement, subsidy control and financial regulations, and will be delivered in a way that appropriately manages conflicts of interest arising from early engagement and co-design.

VCS organisations work in partnership together and with other sectors, seeking to remove barriers for smaller VCS partners.

The Council encourages the VCS to work in partnership when it commissions services through multiyear funding arrangements, recognising that sustainable partnership working is vital to working jointly on long term issues.

The Council works with the voluntary sector in a fair, open, and transparent way to reduce barriers to and creates opportunities for partnership working.

3. Participation and inclusion

The Partnership Agreement provides greater opportunities for people to influence decisions and activities affecting their lives, where the Council and VCS enable increased involvement and representation.

Enable diversity, equity and inclusion

VCS organisations further diversity, equity and inclusion in ways that are relevant to their mission and represent the interests of the people or causes they have been established to support.

The Council works with the VCS to ensure relevant groups are represented in policymaking, through whichever method is most appropriate, particularly those who may experience barriers or exclusion, and listens to those impacted by decisions.

The VCS will work with the Council to improve community cohesion within the borough, and specifically to realise the ambitions of the Council's Ant-Racism statement.

The Council and the VCS follow accessibility, communication, and equality impact assessment best practice requirements.

Engaging residents and communities in decision making and delivery

The Council and the VCS have a shared ambition to involve communities and residents in shaping services that may affect them.

VCS organisations involve their beneficiaries in their work, including those with lived experience, where it is relevant to their mission.

Removing barriers to active participation to build a healthy democracy and community resilience

The Council and the VCS work together to facilitate and create the conditions for active participation in society, such as volunteering or social action, to build community capacity, social cohesion and resilience.

The VCS have a responsibility to highlight opportunities for residents to get involved with democratic decisions.

4. Transparency and data

The Partnership Agreement champions more open sharing of information and data to enable understanding of need and facilitate evidence-based solutions.

To ensure the maintenance of necessary standards and practices, all data sharing will comply with UK GDPR where personal data is involved.

Engage in open, honest and transparent communication

The VCS and the Council work together to create the conditions needed for open communication, applying proportionate and well explained confidentiality arrangements.

The Council aims to offer feedback after engagement on policy and funding decisions to drive learning and improvements.

The Council follows LGA guidance regarding the publication of impact assessments and consultation responses.

Make evidence and data publicly available

The VCS maintains public trust by being proactively transparent and accountable for the money they receive.

VCS organisations share the research and analysis they undertake as far as reasonably possible, whilst also complying with data protection regulations.

Improve data development

The VCS and the Council work together to find effective ways to measure the value and health of civil society, identify any evidence gaps and review adherence to this Partnership Agreement.

The VCS and the Council work together to recognise the value of different evidence sources, including lived experience.

The VCS and the Council work together to improve data collection, recognising the data and evidence challenges that civil society organisations can face and being informed by a range of different evidence sources and insights.

Embedding the Reading Partnership Agreement

To Improve engagement and participation an online hub on the RVA website will provide guidance, case studies and an online feedback form.

The Partnership Agreement will be considered in developing new Council policy, strategy or service proposals.

Annual presentation on the delivery and outcomes of the Agreement to the Council's Policy Committee.

Annual outcomes presentation to the Council's Social Inclusion Board to include Infrastructure delivery partners.

Quarterly review of the Agreement at VCS Intelligence Network meetings

The Agreement will be a standing agenda item for VCS Leaders meetings with the Council Leader and Senior Management.

VCS PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT ACTION PLAN 2026 – 2029

(Actions continuing from previous years / **new actions from 2026**)

1. RECOGNITION & VALUE

Action	Activity / Deliverables	Lead	Timescale	Update
RBC Commission an Infrastructure service through Closing the Gap 2026.	An extensive range of advice and support services covering the 4 functions of VCS Infrastructure: Leadership and Advocacy: Giving a voice to the VCS sector, championing local community needs. Partnerships and Collaboration: Connecting diverse organizations, building cross-sector alliances, and facilitating joint working Capacity Building: Providing practical support, training, and resources to help small charities and community groups develop and thrive. Volunteering: Nurturing and encouraging volunteering opportunities, connecting people with causes they care about to drive local, positive change	Reading Voluntary Action in partnership with Reading Advice Network and Connect Reading	April 2026 with a 3–5-year cycle	Quarterly monitoring and outcomes available.
VCS Partnership Agreement Annual Statement	Develop an Annual Statement of achievements and progress against the VCS Partnership Agreement Action Plan, (including feedback from VCS), which can be presented to Policy Committee and shared publicly.	RBC / RVA	May 2027	
Provide training and mentor support to enable groups to evidence impact and raise awareness of their work.	To raise awareness of the effectiveness of community groups.	RVA	May 2027	

2. PARTNERSHIP & COLLABORATION

Action	Activity / Deliverables	Lead	Timescale	Update
Work collectively to identify potential social value priorities to promote as opportunities through RBC procurement.	Commercial organisations winning RBC contracts contribute their skills and resources to achieve better outcomes for Reading residents.	RBC / Connect Reading/ RVA	May 2027	
Identify and share VCS engagement opportunities within Service Plan priorities	Systematic assessment of potential VCS engagement opportunities.	RBC	May 2027	
RBC Staff Volunteering Policy	Ability of staff to undertake 2 days per year paid leave for volunteering with Reading VCS?	RBC	May 2027	
RBC Working with Volunteers Policy	Agreed guidelines for how RBC services include supported volunteers when delivering services.	RBC	May 2027	
Work collectively as Closing the Gap 'providers' and RBC to improve collaborative working through the Closing the Gap Action Research Partnership	Improved opportunities for partnership working and joint learning across VCS and RBC, to enable better public health outcomes for communities	RBC / VCS	Closing the Gap contract cycle (3-5 years)	
Develop and maintain dedicated MS Teams site for VCS organisations delivering CTG2 commissioned services.	Ability for CTG2 providers to interact with each other and the Council.	RBC	June 2026	
Provide the Reading4Community Funding Portal	Provide VCS with information on potential funding opportunities.	RBC	Ongoing	
Enable VCS organisations to be able to express their accommodation needs to identify opportunities within RBC assets	Aligning available / surplus RBC assets with local VCS accommodation needs.	RBC / VCS	Ongoing	
Successful delivery of Small Grants Fund	Direct financial support to VCS activities within the borough.	RBC	January 2027	
Review and improve VCS Support / Volunteering pages on RBC website	Expand the range of information and support available on volunteering within RBC website.	RBC	October 2026	
Support for VCS workforce development through targeted Public Health training offers	Training offer to include Suicide First Aid tutor training, mental health and	RBC	May 2027	

	wellbeing training for VCS organisations.			
Public Health joint learning and system-wide capacity building.	Place Universal Offer training and previous facilitation of See Change training with VCS partners	RBC	May 2027	
Public Health Training for VCS	An ongoing intention to work with RVA and VCS partners to identify priority training needs where these align with public health and wider system objectives.	RBC	May 2027	

3. PARTICIPATION & INCLUSION

Action	Activity / Deliverables	Lead	Timescale	Update
Engagement and comms to promote the Partnership Agreement across the VCS with opportunities to feed into the annual review.	Widen the partnership between RBC and the VCS, ensuring all parts of the VCS can input and shape the relationship.	RVA / RBC / VCS	May 2027	
Deliver themed VCS Assembly meetings, to share opportunities and propose solutions to issues	Opportunities for whole VCS and stakeholders to discuss priorities and solutions.	RVA	May 2027	
Maintain single point of contact escalation point for VCS Issues	A clear point of contact for the VCS on any immediate issues.	RBC	Ongoing	
VCS briefing on the RBC Budget for the forthcoming year	Provide an annual briefing for VCS organisations on the RBC Budget for the forthcoming year.	RBC	February (each year)	

4. TRANSPARENCY & DATA

Action	Activity / Deliverables	Lead	Timescale	Update
Map community groups.	Community groups are more visible.	RVA	May 2027	
RBC Leader & Senior Manager meetings with CTG2 Infrastructure providers	Direct strategic discussion opportunity between senior Council leadership and VCS Leaders.	RBC / VCS	3 meetings per year	
Maintain the Voluntary Sector Intelligence Network meetings	Sector-led information sharing and discussion on live issues.	RBC	Monthly Meetings	
Social Inclusion Board meeting dedicated to VCS	Opportunity for VCS to discuss current issues and explore future options with key senior RBC managers and partners.	RBC	May 2027	

Closing the Gap 2 Implementation & Monitoring	Increasing the resilience of residents through collaborative working with VCS.	RBC / VCS	Ongoing	
Analysis of volunteering within the borough	Improved understanding of volunteer opportunities and volunteer numbers within the borough.	RVA	May 2027	
VCS celebration events	Showcase and celebrate volunteering in all its forms across our communities.	RVA	May 2027	
Analysis of RBC financial contribution to VCS	Detailed understanding of how Council resources are utilised within the VCS, and how they support RBC delivery and financial priorities.	RBC	May 2027	

Appendix 2: Health In All Policies – Impact Assessment Form

Wider determinants: Does the proposal significantly change any wider determinants of health? No

Equity and vulnerability: Could any group experience disproportionate impacts or are protected groups impacted? No

Inequalities: Could the proposal widen or reduce existing health inequalities in Reading? Yes

Scale: Does the proposal affect a large number of people (over 5,000) or multiple wards? Yes

Public/political profile: Is the proposal high-profile, controversial or significant shift in current service delivery? No

Opportunity: Is there a clear window of opportunity to enhance health outcomes through modification? No

Statutory: Do other assessments indicate likely health impacts? No

Project title: VCS Partnership Agreement

Lead officer - author or HIA: Mark Redfearn

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Department: Policy

Directorate: Directorate of Resources (DOR)

Summary of the proposal: Reading continues to have a vibrant, effective, and committed voluntary and community sector. The Council along with the many and varied groups and organisations that make up the voluntary and community sector have the same broad ambitions of improving the quality of life for the residents and communities of Reading. In 2023, a new Compact agreement was co-produced by the Council and many of the voluntary and community sector organisations from across the borough. The aim of the Compact was to create and embed mechanisms that ensure our work to improve the lives of our residents and communities is effectively joined up, that our complementary efforts are targeted where they can add most value and that each partner organisation supports the other as much as it can. To ensure its relevance to the current working relationship between the Council and the local Voluntary and Community Sector, the Compact document has been reviewed and a new 'Partnership Agreement' document has been co-produced with the sector. The new Partnership Agreement reflects the successes of the previous Compact agreement and action plan, the learning from collaborative working between the Council and the local VCS and incorporates the principles of the new Civil Society Covenant.

Who is affected by this proposal? Asylum seekers/refugees, Ethnic minorities, People living in areas of high social and economic deprivation, Families with young children, Children and young people (0 to 19 years), Adults aged between 18 and 60, Older people (60+), Women and girls, Men and boys, Carers, Unhoused people, People with dementia, Religious or belief groups, Visitors or those working in the district

Select all themes that have a link to the proposal: Social and community wellbeing
Impact: Positive

Impact certainty: Certain of impact

Description of impact: The VCS Partnership Agreement provides a commitment to collaborative working between the Council and the local VCS. The successes of the previous VCS Compact agreement are evidence of the positive outcomes that collaborative working and a commitment to the local VCS can deliver - including:

- Six monthly meetings between VCS infrastructure support organisations and the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive to discuss important issues for the sector;
- During the lifespan of the Compact, the Council has provided over £475,000 to local grassroots VCS organisations via its Small Grants Fund;
- Reading Voluntary Action have completed a comprehensive 'State of the Sector' survey which has been used to inform the commissioning of services to support the local VCS;
- Monthly VCS Intelligence Network meetings have been held to keep the VCS informed of Council activities, and to provide an opportunity for the VCS to feedback their views;
- Over 20 local VCS organisations have been given access to support from the Council's Employee Assistance Programme;
- A new 'accommodation request process' has been introduced to help local VCS organisations enquire about surplus Council accommodation that may be available to use;
- Extensive engagement has been conducted with the VCS on commissioning activities, including the £1.4M p.a. Closing the Gap services;
- An analysis of the Council's spend shows that approx. £14M p.a. has been spent on VCS organisations – including £7M on Health and Social Care, £3M on Housing and Homelessness, £1.5M on Tackling Inequalities, and just under £1M on Community Safety;
- Within this, in 2025/26, the Council provided £717,801 in grant funding to the local VCS, including £125,000 in Small Grants funding to 30 local VCS organisations;
- The Council has maintained its Reading4Community funding portal so that local VCS organisations can search for available funding opportunities;
- Many VCS organisations have provided Cost-of-Living support to over 8,000 low-income via the Household Support Fund;
- The Council maintains a dedicated resource for VCS organisations on its RBC website;
- There is a single point of contact within the Council to aid communication between VCS organisations and the Council;
- The Council continues to offer all its employees the opportunity to take two days paid leave to volunteer within the borough;
- The Council has updated its Asset Disposal Policy to make it clearer for VCS organisations to bid for surplus Council assets.

Mitigation actions: The VCS Partnership Agreement Action Plan is being reviewed by the VCS Intelligence Network and overseen by the Social Inclusion Board