



## **BETTER TOGETHER POLICY FORUM BRIEFING NOTE**

### ***Finding Common Ground on Social Value Impact Measurement***

**When: Friday 11th October 2024 (9:30 – 12:30)**

**Where: Durham Town Hall**

**Context:**

This is the second Policy Forum of 2024, and the latest in a series of bi-annual conferences, led by the VCSE in County Durham. The Policy Forums are planned to address policy themes which are important for our sector and for our communities.

According to the theme, relevant public sector partners and commissioners will be invited to participate with our colleagues from the VCSE.

The general aims of Policy Forums are to:

- provide regular opportunities for the VCSE to meet with elected members, heads of service and public sector members of the County Durham Partnership: to share intelligence, showcase good practice, and to identify opportunities and gaps in cross sector working relationships.
- enable a wider cross section of VCSE providers to engage with the Better Together Forum, as an opportunity to network, discuss policy, showcase good practice and meet with public sector partners.
- enable more focused discussion and consultation which is relevant and current.
- Offer an informed overview from the voluntary sector about how public policy is affecting services in County Durham.

Regular Policy Forums have been organised over the past five years, and have covered a diverse range of issues and themes, including health, wellbeing and partnership working. In October 2023, the theme focussed on 'The County Durham Evidence Base' and how we work together to build inclusive insight that informs decision making. It covered research agendas and how we gather and use shared intelligence to inform and shape our services. In April of 2024, the theme for the Policy Forum was Ageing Well in County Durham exploring how we might maximize the benefits of collaboration to promote ageing well and improve lives.

The Policy Forums are catalysts for better dialogue, and they have enabled a stronger understanding between voluntary and public sector partners. In particular, they have contributed to our collaborative approaches in responding to the needs of people in our communities, and to the changing face of support services, now and in the future.

VCSE organisations which take part in the Better Together Network form a nucleus for discussion and good practice exchange.

The Better Together Forum members met in June of 2024 to discuss ways in which the sector can demonstrate the contribution of the VCSE to the social and economic wellbeing of the County. This built on previous Forum discussions and has generated momentum towards a more nuanced conversation within the sector about evidencing the social value impacts of our work.

### **October Topic:**

#### **Valuing Social Impacts of the VCSE in County Durham: how do we make best use of the social value impact measurement opportunities available?**

This Policy Forum provides an opportunity to continue developing the dialogue which began with looking at shared research agendas at last October's Forum. We want to continue to explore the opportunities to work together to assure an 'inclusive evidence base' and recognise the significant impact driven by the VCSE. During the summer months we consulted with VCSE partners about how their respective organisations collect and share the outcomes and impacts of their work. We aim to share the outcomes of the consultations and to reflect on common themes and issues which are emerging.

There have been significant developments and changes in approaches by public sector and the organisations which invest in the VCSE, in terms of their governance and funding priorities. This has led to some evolution in terms of priorities for procurement and asks of the sector with respect to who and how they target their services and support. In particular, we have seen the launch of the Durham Pound, the advent of the Integrated Care System, and more recently, the new North East Combined Authority.

Durham Pound is championing Social Value as an essential core to public sector procurement, with aims to ensure the communities of County Durham stand to benefit directly and indirectly from all public spending programmes. Durham Pound works with Durham Pound Supporters (businesses and providers with interests in County Durham) and are looking at ways in which the private sector supporters can collaborate more effectively with the VCSE to maximise social value accruing from procurement in the County.

The VCSE makes an important contribution to social and economic wellbeing across County Durham, both as employers of local people, and as agents for community and voluntary action, building skills and vital social and cultural networks. How is this evidenced, and what are the most effective ways for the sector to be both influential and a beneficiary of procurement policies?

The purpose of this Policy Conference is to explore how procurement, commissioning and delivery is working through the Durham Pound and through the ways and means the VCSE demonstrate their contribution, value & impacts.

The event will provide insights from the public sector, including an update from Durham Pound, and report back from consultations within the VCSE over the summer about how the sector is working to demonstrate the impacts of their work.

Importantly, the event will provide an opportunity to discuss common themes for collaboration, to measure the social value impacts of the VCSE contribution, and the means by which this can contribute to shaping public sector policy.

Better Together Policy Forums have a simple format: a keynote stimulus at the start and then focus on roundtable discussions.

At this forum, we aim to consider the following:

If the VCSE are to be regarded as mainstream partners and contributors to the economy in County Durham, what do we need in place to evidence the impacts and strength of their contributions? And what collaborative opportunities can private sector Durham Pound Supporters provide to the sector to support?

To explore:

What (resources, skills, tools) do the VCSE need in order to evidence the impacts of their work more effectively?

How does the VCSE get best value out of Durham Pound Supporters and what areas of collaboration would be most effective and useful?

How can we use Social Value evidence to strengthen partnership working across the sector and investments for partnerships?

With roundtable discussions also capturing:

- Potential opportunities for projects to test social value research e.g. common themes (Volunteers, wellbeing) thematic partnerships (Advice)
- Scope for adoption of Social Value Engine and level of interest in follow up workshop/s.
- Shared messages between commissioners and VCSE providers