

BETTER TOGETHER POLICY FORUM

Tuesday 17th June 2025



Better for everyone

Welcome & Introductions

Kate Burrows
Executive Director, Durham Community Action
Chair of the Better Together Forum



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BETTER TOGETHER POLICY FORUM

Valuing and supporting a thriving VCSE: What does good grant making look like?

Looking beyond the means for measuring and evidencing impacts and outcomes.

How can we best model and apply investment into the sector?



BETTER TOGETHER FORUM

Valuing and supporting a thriving VCSE: What does good grant making look like?

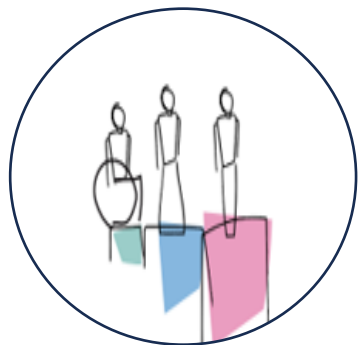
Kirsty Wilkinson

Public Health Strategic Manager and
CDT VCSE Leadership Group Vice Chair

17 June 2025



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Vision

County Durham Together is about working with communities, especially those most in need, making sure they are at the heart of decision making, building on their existing skills, knowledge, experience and resources to support everyone to thrive and to live happy, healthy and connected lives.



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Declarations of interest!



The Queen's Award
for Voluntary Service
The MBE for volunteer groups



CROOK
Community Leisure



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Declarations of interest!



Why the voluntary and community sector is so important...

- Organisations whose primary purpose is to create **social impact** rather than profit
- A belief in **collective action**
- Social justice and making a **positive difference** to people's lives
- Take a **holistic approach** to people's needs
- **Empowering people** and making voices heard
- Build **social capital** and reinvesting financial surpluses for **community need**.
- Understand and adapt to community needs/trends/issues





Sharing Decision Making
Engaging and developing



Empowering Communities
Working with communities
to support their development
and empowerment.



Using What Works
Everything we do is supported
by evidence informed by local
conversations.

The County Durham Approach to Wellbeing



Working Better Together
Across sectors to reduce
duplication and ensure
greater impact.

Being Asset Focused
Acknowledging the different
needs of communities and
the potential of their assets.



Doing with, not to
Making our interventions
empowering and centred
around you as an individual.



Building Resilience
Helping the most disadvantaged
and vulnerable build up their



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Challenges – Public Sector



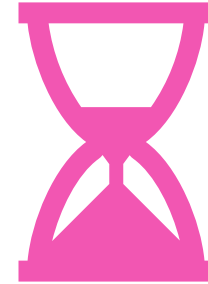
Widening
inequalities



Resources



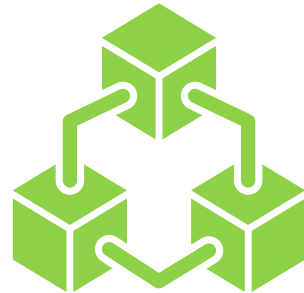
Demand



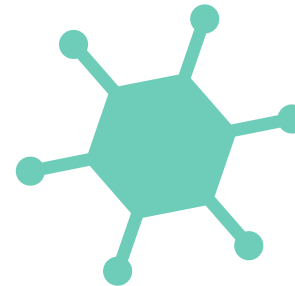
Reactive



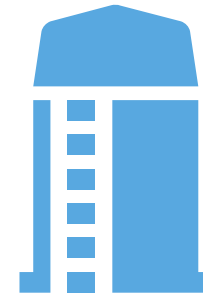
Short term fix



Fit people
into services



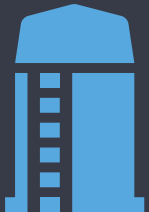
Duplication



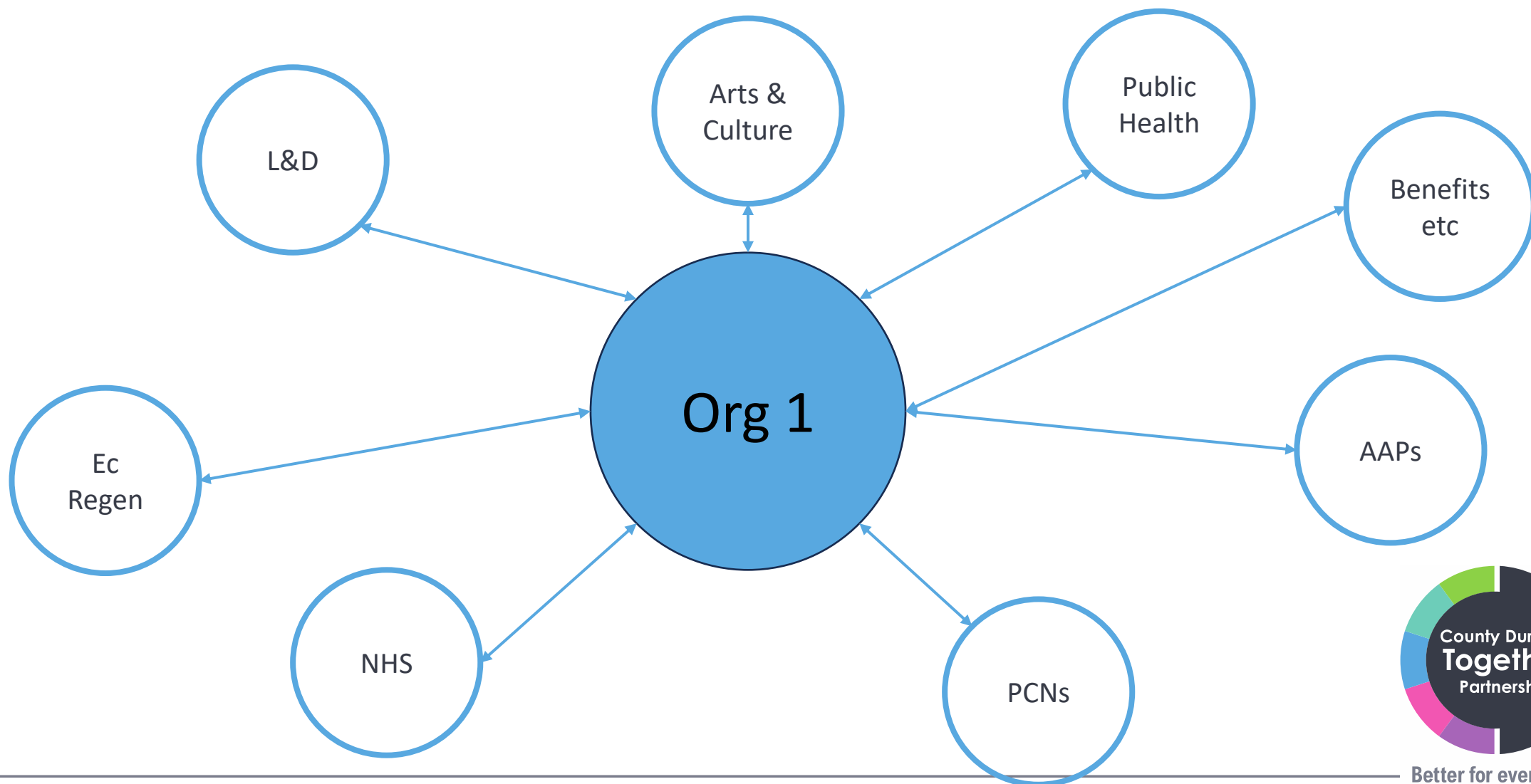
Silo
working



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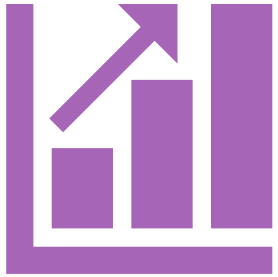


Challenges – Silo working



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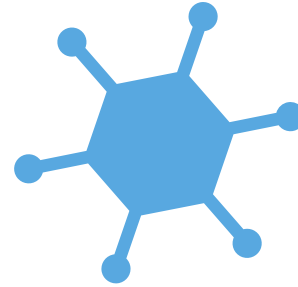
Challenges – VCSE Sector



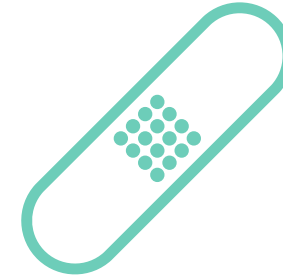
Demand



Resources



Competing
priorities of
funders



Short term
and insecure
funding



Prescriptive



Monitoring



Something new



"Nice to do"



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The aim

Work better together to support a more sustainable VCS in County Durham in the future.

Draw on capacity and build capability:

- Longer term better aligned investment approaches
- Better coordination of funding for both VCS infrastructure and delivery
- Minimise the competing demands of different strategic VCS funders on the VCSE

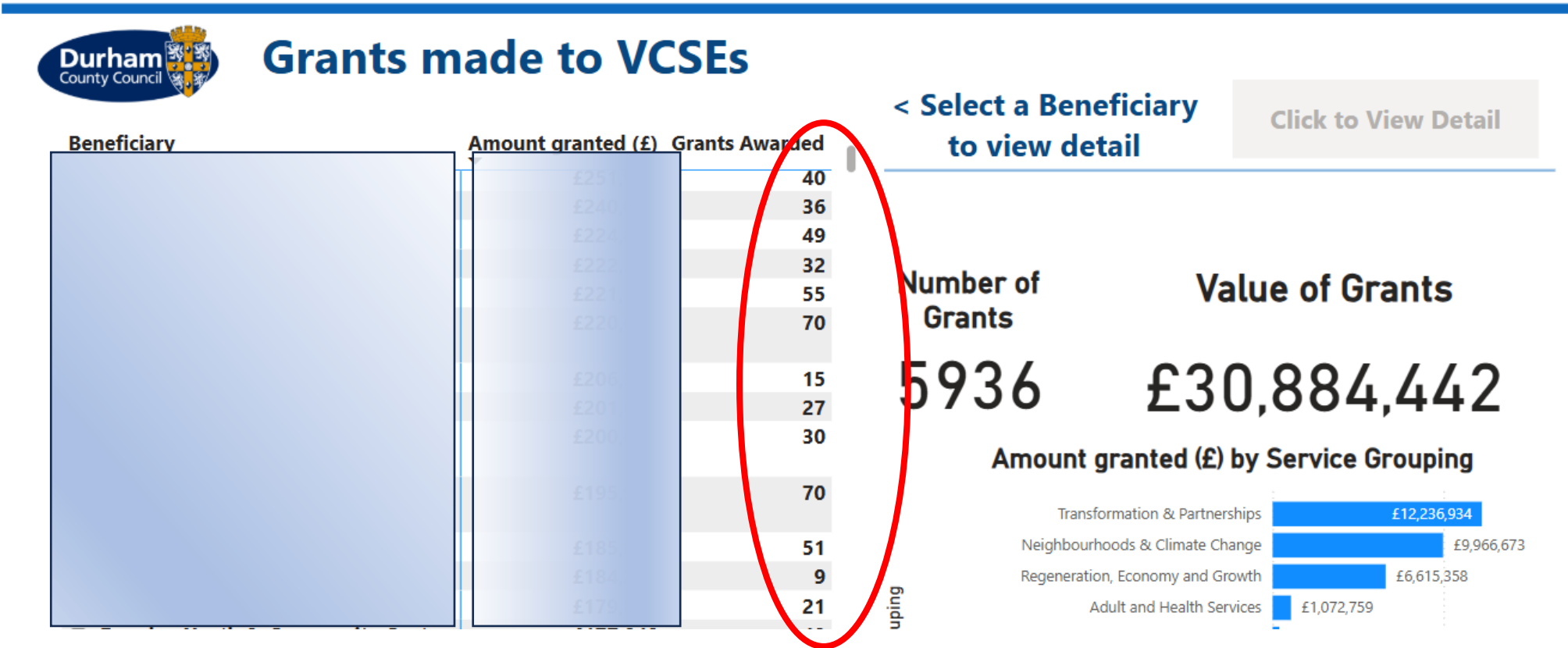


Our intent

- Maximise and align cross sector investment into the voluntary and community sector.
- Increase the knowledge and understanding within statutory bodies of the role and contribution of the VCSE sector at a local level.
- Adapt/explore and test new ways of working together to invest in the VCSE/different approaches to commissioning the VCSE sector.
- Make use of the sector's insights and strengths to better meet population needs as a system.
- Develop a VCSE investment framework or co-produced strategy for working with the VCSE sector and a delivery plan.
- Support civic commissioners to review existing contracting relationships and opportunities for diversifying service providers including VCSE organisations.
- Work towards a fundamental shift in culture, investment and process
- Identify opportunities that encourage collaboration and that support the co-design of solutions, building on local capacity and strengths.
- Gain support for, implement and oversee, Employer Supported Volunteering Schemes



Work so far



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2018-19 to 2023-24 (6 years)

Work so far - Recommendations

- Development of an appropriate (CRM) for grants
- An internal lead or key member of departmental staff responsible for the collection and collation of data
- Consolidation of grants under either a single Service Group or, if further identification of Service Group collaborative funding is required a secondary and tertiary grouping,
- All Service Groups to be contacted and updated about the data capture that the Council requires to make public
- Establishing of agreed Service Groups and strategy headers for data fields
- Further evidence of due diligence and good grant-making governance



Next steps

- Today!
 - Guidance for VCSE Grant Funders/Investors and Commissioners
- “Accord”



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QUESTIONS/COMMENTS



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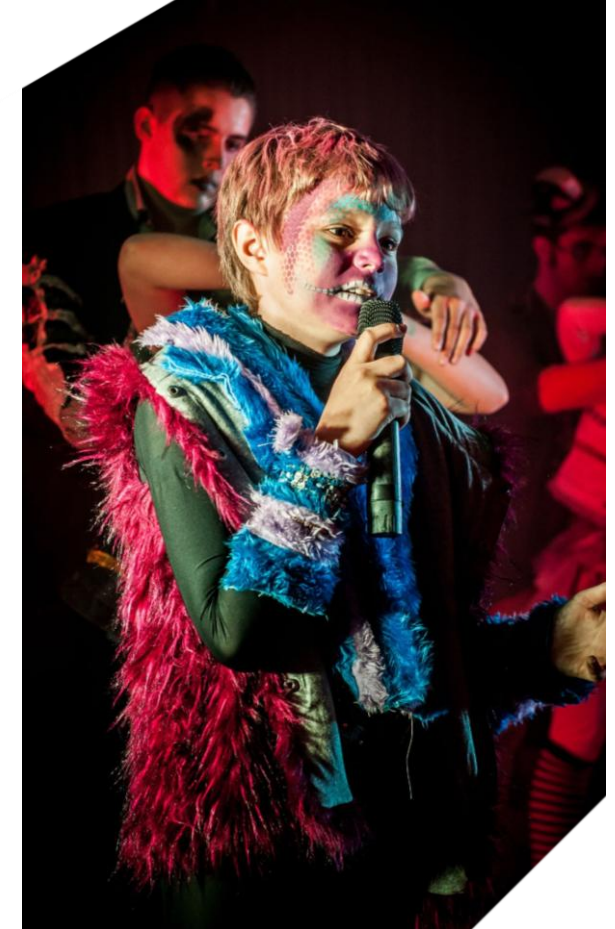
Better Together Conference
Michelle Cooper, CEO

17 June 2025

Introduction

- Independent grant-making charity
- Awarded c£72m in 30 years to 14,600 organisations, and 7,600 individuals (48% by value since 2018)
- UK Community Foundations member
- Connect and collaborate with businesses, local authorities, NHS, Government and individuals to create a better today and a brighter tomorrow for local people
- Tackle broad range of inequalities: poverty, health & wellbeing, as well as building stronger communities

Aim: make lasting difference in communities we work in by helping you fight poverty and enrich lives



What is in a name.....



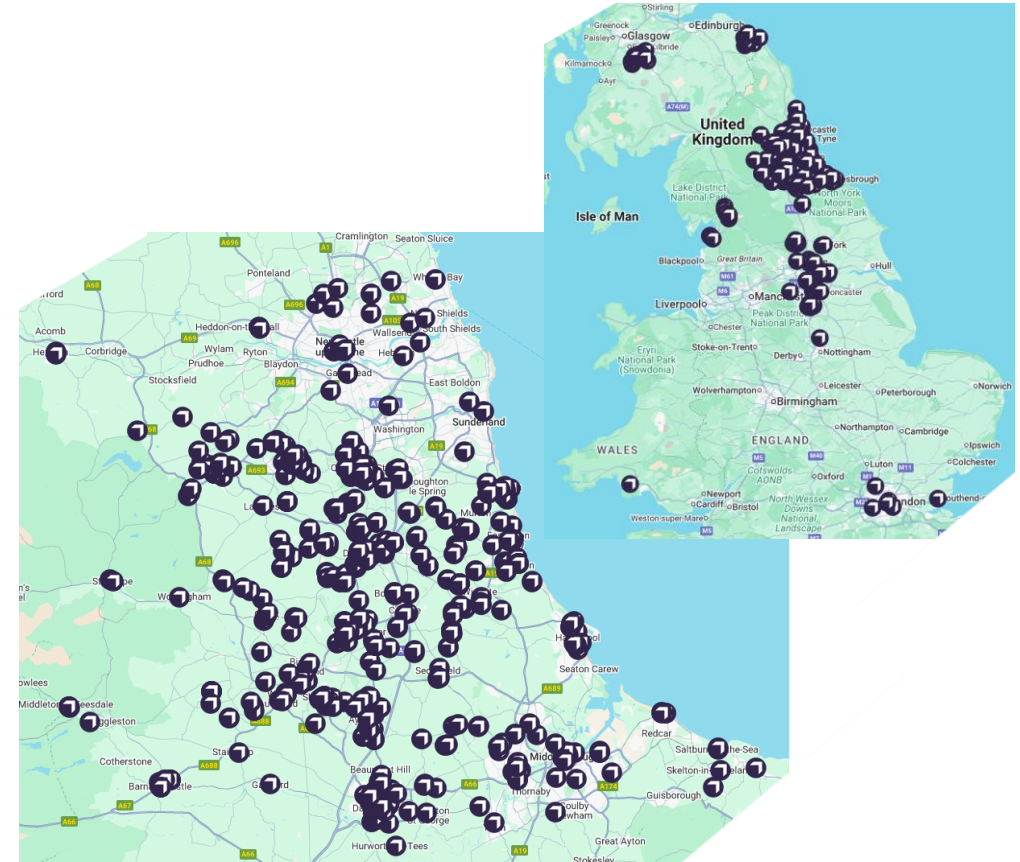
County Durham
Community Foundation
Fighting Poverty and Enriching Lives



A lot, if it isn't helpful and confusing



- Consultation with stakeholders, including groups
- Better reflect where we work
- Modern, fresh, simple name
- **More money in**
- **Flexible, unrestricted**



Community foundation model

Philanthropy - do to, not with.....

- Endowments
 - Purpose - largely '30 years old' - not need today
 - Restricted – by place or purpose
 - Just **28%** of grant spend in FY2024/25
- Flow through – needed to pay salaries but keeps us relevant re. need
 - 53%** of grant spend in FY2024/25 (balance windfarms)
 - Won yearly, or at best, three-year partnership
 - If **lucky**, unrestricted and offers what you **want** (#PovertyHurts)
 - If **unlucky** (Government/ NHS) - nightmare to deliver, low income and over-subscribed



Point North aim

Flexible, easier to access funds (not there yet)



Understand
community
needs



Design
funds



Monitor
impact



Capture
stories &
data

Works with donors to help them understand how their money can best make a difference

IVAR – Flexible funding

Institute for Voluntary Action Research, Est 2006



Our vision for Open and Trusting Grant-making

When funders join the Open and Trusting community, they are signing up to this vision.

Voluntary organisations need flexible funding to deliver better outcomes for communities. So, we make and manage grants in a way that enables them to respond to changing needs.

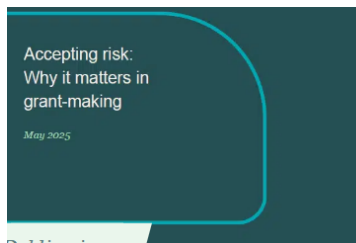
In a context of limited resources and increasing need, we believe that working together towards shared goals, by making the most use of precious resources on all sides, will lead to greater impact.

Ultimately, our vision is that:

- Grant processes feel easy, straightforward and trusting
- Voluntary organisations are respected and trusted to know best how to deliver their missions
- Voluntary organisations and funders approach impact as a shared endeavour
- A culture of mutual understanding and respect becomes the norm

How we make grants matters – who we reach, how we judge applications, the kind of funding we give and the relationships we build. We hope that by working in this way, we create more equitable funding that enables communities to flourish and thrive.

IVAR Publications

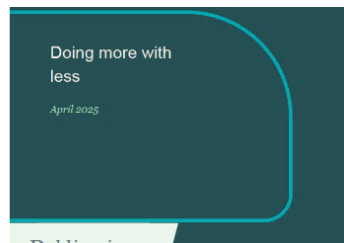


Publication

Accepting risk: why it matters in grant-making

Risk is inherent in any grant, project, or enterprise – there is no venture...

[Read more](#)

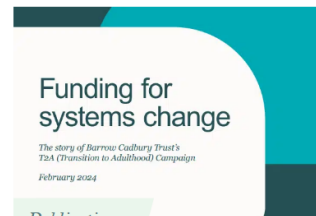


Publication

Doing more with less

'Leading in Uncertainty' is a programme of online support for charity leaders, facilitated by members...

[Read more](#)



Publication

Funding for systems change: The story of Barrow Cadbury Trust's Transition to Adulthood Campaign

Two decades ago, Barrow Cadbury Trust initiated Transition to Adulthood ('T2A') – a collaborative...

[Read more](#)

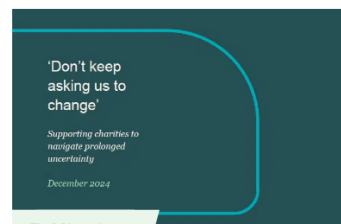


Publication

Time to end the dominance of short-term grants: The evidence for multi-year funding

In 2022, charities told us that funders need to give more attention to the...

[Read more](#)



Publication

'Don't keep asking us to change'

'Leading in Uncertainty' is a programme of online support for charity leaders. It was established...

[Read more](#)

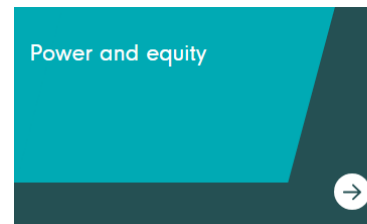


Publication

Exploring approaches to assessing the impact of unrestricted funding

This report was commissioned by the Co-op Foundation, seeking to address the research question:...

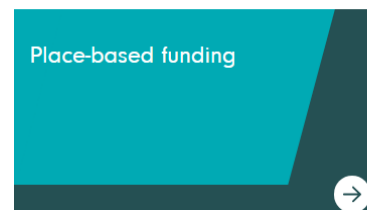
[Read more](#)



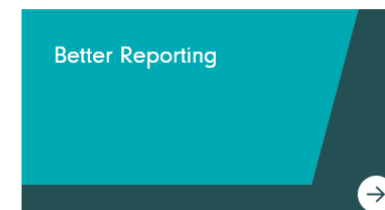
Power and equity



Applications and assessments



Place-based funding



Better Reporting



Always challenging funders

but....

It feels right as it is done well, and we are in the conversations

The eight commitments

1. Don't waste time

We will explain our funding priorities clearly; we will be open and transparent about all our requirements and exclusions.

2. Ask relevant questions

We will only collect information that we must have to make funding decisions; we will test our application forms rigorously to make sure our questions are clear and do not overlap.

3. Accept risk

We will be realistic about how much assurance applicants can reasonably give us; we will clearly explain how we assess risk when we make our funding decisions.

4. Act with urgency

We will seek to work at a pace that meets the needs of applicants; we will publish and stick to our timetables; we will make our decisions as quickly as possible.

5. Be open

We will give feedback; we will analyse and publish success rates and reasons for rejection; we will share our data.

6. Be flexible

We will enable funded organisations to respond flexibly to changing priorities and needs – we will give unrestricted funding; if we can't, we will make our funding as flexible as possible.

7. Communicate with purpose

We will be clear about our relationship from the start – we will be realistic about time commitments; we will ensure that our contact is positive and purposeful.

8. Be proportionate

We will commit to light-touch reporting – we will ensure that our formal reporting requirements are well understood, proportionate and meaningful.

IVAR Signatory
'sometime' in early
Covid

IVAR evaluation 2023

Third party evaluation
2025

Making commitments to our communities

- Commitments help create a roadmap to good grant making
- Work behind each one drives evaluation and reflection of our processes, ideology about funding and programmes, and our relevance in the distribution of funds
- Sparked a review of application processes, accessibility, relevance, fairness, and attention to feedback
- Introduced different ways of communicating with communities – social media promotions, funding help line, more reflective feedback on unsuccessful applications, a different tone of voice in our guidelines and communications
- And a target: the 'holy grail' - accessible, unrestricted funding to trusted organisations, that meets the needs of the community, and that makes a measurable difference to people's lives

Are we a flexible funder – NPS results



Don't waste time, be open, communicate, act with urgency

Fund description

The Care Leavers' Future Fund provides grants to support young care leavers aged 17 to 25 to help with their education, training or employment.

[Download Application Guidelines](#)[Go to Application Portal](#)

Everything you need to know before you apply

Location(s): County Durham, Gateshead, South Tyneside, Sunderland, Tees Valley

Grant size: Up to £1,000

Who can apply?

By care leavers, we mean anyone who has spent six months or more in the care of one of the eligible Local Authorities (listed below) at any time in their life.

This could have been:

- In residential care
- With a foster carer
- Living with friends or relatives
- In kinship foster care
- Living at home, under the supervision of a Social Worker
- Other residential settings such as residential schools

The eligible Local Authorities for this Fund are:

- County Durham
- Tees Valley
- Wearside
- South Tyneside

Key information

Enriching lives of young care leavers

No deadline

County Durham, Gateshead, South Tyneside, Sunderland, Tees Valley

Up to £1,000

6 weeks decision time

Youth Opportunities

Need help? Get in touch.

info@pointnorth.org.uk
[0191 378 6340](tel:01913786340)
[Book a call](#)



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info@pointnorth.org.uk
[0191 378 6340](tel:01913786340)
[Book a call](#)

Point North grants

At Point North, we offer a variety of grants to support local people, charities, and community groups across the North East, particularly in County Durham and Tees Valley.

Our aim is to make the application process as straightforward as possible. Whether you're applying on behalf of an individual or as part of a group, you can apply online and get support from our Grants team if you need it.

Grants for Groups

If you're part of a community group or charity, use the Group filter below to see all the grants available to fund your projects and initiatives. We support a wide range of activities that fight poverty and enrich lives.

Grants for Individuals

Grants

The filters below can help you search our available grants, but you don't have to use them.

If you don't use the filters, you'll automatically see all grants ordered by application deadline, the ones with the earliest deadline will show first. If you can't find what you're looking for, try the search bar.

Sort by recently added (default)

Grant type

Grant location

Grant size (£)

Grant pillar

Search...



Mayor's Opportunity Fund Round 2

Enriching lives of local people

Apply by 7 July 2025

County Durham

Between £5,000 and £10,000

September 2025 decision time



Wind Farm: Haswell Moor Wind Farm Community Benefits Fund

Benefiting communities in and around Haswell

Apply by 23 July 2025

County Durham

Up to £5,000



Wind Farm: High Haswell Community Benefits Fund

Benefiting communities in and around High Haswell

Apply by 23 July 2025

County Durham

Up to £5,000

12 weeks decision time

What we do as a funder

- Find money - work with businesses, individuals, and the public sector to develop funds (**translate** their wants to align with community need)
- Raise awareness – social media, events and working in partnership to drive grant applications (but not too many as don't want to waste time)
- Accept applications – accessible, online portal for groups to apply
- Support – phone support and online funding surgeries fortnightly for applicants and potential applicants (empower the group)
- Due diligence – checks on every group applying and their application (**frustrating for you we know** but requirement of source of monies e.g. £0.5m liability on our books)
- Advise – put forward eligible grants for panel and donor decision (rules)
- Research – undertake consultation and research to shape giving to support community need
- Evaluate – review or programmes, processes and monitoring to show difference funding makes

Adapting to change and reacting to need

- Covid allowed a real step change in how we operated - our processes (trust, speed), our grant making (trust, speed) and our culture (team)
- Different working practices - working more with organisations, donors, local authorities and national agencies
- Systems and processes don't (and shouldn't) standstill - continuously reviewed and updated
- Consultation with funded organisations to determine capacity and need in changing economic climates – top ups to Government funds; community grant now up to £7k
- Work continually with donors to relax criteria, to shift towards more unrestricted grant making, and to core funding
- Work with our trustees to recognise financial stress points in community organisations, guiding them to be less risk averse
- Accredited by UKCF and registered with the fundraising regulator – regular reviews

Community focussed grant making

We continue to research, evaluate and consult (and hopefully drive change)

- Commissioned work e.g. Health Equity North report looking at systemic poverty and its effects on opportunities within communities - *what poverty is and isn't*
- Ongoing community consultation with organisations – ‘You said – We did’, new programmes, extension of programmes
- Using data and knowledge to shape programmes – own reserves for the ‘unsexy’ grants – *Organisational Sustainability and Relief in need*
- Develop impact evaluation of programmes to identify ROI and social impact to inform commissioners and help donors measure impact
- Include ‘lived experience’ and the voice of funded organisations and individuals to shape our processes and programmes
- Consult (or fight with) public sector bodies to drive collaborative grant making and form partnerships to make funding more accessible to community organisations
- Challenged ourselves constantly – ‘why not....’ or ‘why can’t we...’

Lessons learned through reflection

- Be bold (**but not rash**) in how we speak out and our ask of our Trustees for support
 - Use of reserves, approach, language, name change
- Never just tick a box – EDI, climate
- Adapt our grant making (**wherever we can**) to support communities
 - Working with donors toward unrestricted, core and multiyear funding
- Commit to make grant making fit for purpose, inclusive and accessible
 - **Subject to restrictions of our funds** e.g. Know your neighbourhood
- Try co-designing programmes with funded groups to shape how funds reach the sector, taking the lead on what's needed within the community
 - Household Support Fund, Welfare fund (cash first)

Doing things differently - 38.7 Challenge



**Join the 38.7 Miles in July challenge
and take action against child poverty**

Why 38.7 miles?

38.7% of children in County Durham and Tees Valley are growing up in poverty.

That's thousands of children missing out on meals, opportunities, and the childhood they deserve.

[Sign up for 38.7 Miles in July here](#)

But it doesn't have to be this way. Together, we can change that.

The 38.7 Miles in July challenge is free to enter, and everyone who sets up a fundraising page will receive a free Point North t-shirt.

Whether you complete the distance in one day or spread it across the month, solo or as part of a team, you'll earn rewards, recognition, and a virtual medal at the finish line.

Every mile you complete and every pound you raise will support children in County Durham and Tees Valley.

For every £100 raised, together we can:

- Help 5 people attend a class or activity that brings joy or teaches something new
- Support 8 young people to develop their talents and build a brighter future
- Provide 12 hot meals for children and families during school holidays

"Thousands of children in our own communities are falling behind through no fault of their own. As the cost of living continues to rise, more families than ever are struggling to get by. The need is urgent and growing. This challenge gives all of us a way to do something about it," said Michelle Cooper, Chief Executive at Point North.

For 30 years, Point North has backed grassroots community projects across the region. In the last year alone, we've supported over 53,000 children and young people with meals, safe spaces, and opportunities to grow, learn and enjoy their childhood.

Whether it's your school run, dog walk, lunchtime stroll or weekend swim, every step you take helps us fight child poverty.

QUESTIONS/COMMENTS



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Comfort Break & Networking



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Roundtable Discussions



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Feedback from tables and Q&A



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Plenary

Summing Up and Next Steps

Kate Burrows
Executive Director, Durham Community Action
Chair – Better Together VCS Forum



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Next steps – end of session

- Guidance for VCSE Grant Funders/Investors and Commissioners
- “Accord”
- Thriving Together Funding
 - Up to 3 years
 - Between £2k and £25k
 - Can be used to sustain existing projects



Networking



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