

BETTER TOGETHER VCSE FORUM

28th April 2026



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Welcome & Introductions

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Chair of the Better Together Forum



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Better Together Policy Forum highlights

Key highlights overall

- Broad agreement with Third Sector Trends findings
- Challenges placing relationships under strain - funding, workforce pressures, capacity and competition
- Opportunities - County Durham benefits from relatively strong networks and a culture of partnership.



Better Together Policy Forum highlights

Key takeaways from partner presentations

- Get your strategy right by knowing who you are and what the community you serve need
- You need time and proper investment in the volunteer or staff workforce to build skills = good partnership
- Be open to accepting what doesn't work
- Larger organisations should work in partnership with trusted existing local and smaller charities



Funding, Trust and Power

Challenges:

- Lack of core and longer-term funding as a barrier to trust-based relationships.
- Competitive funding environments limit openness and collaboration.

Opportunities:

- Attendees emphasised the importance of honest and transparent conversations with funders
- Funders visiting services to align investment with real need.
- Income diversification & forward planning

Capacity and Participation

Challenges:

- Difficulties recruiting and retaining volunteers and trustees reduce the ability of some VCSE organisations to engage consistently in strategic partnerships.
- Measuring impact

Opportunities:

- Support with governance and trustee development
- Organisational health checks to strengthen participation in system relationships and demonstrate impact.
- AI Support

Collaboration and System Coherence

- **Challenges:**

- Improve understanding of the diversity of the VCSE sector
- Mapping delivery to reduce duplication and strengthen referral pathways.

- **Opportunities:**

- Better peer support and shared learning
- Improved communications between all partners



Strategic Alignment

Challenges:

- Limited capacity for VCSE to engage and develop stronger links to system priorities e.g. the NHS 10-Year Plan

Opportunities:

- Stronger links to system priorities is key to increasing VCSE influence.
- Optimism that with support from DCA, collaboration can increase collective capacity and strengthen system relationships despite limited resources



System Leadership & Moving Together in Co Durham

Better Together round table
Becks Lippe (28th April 2026)



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Roundtable Discussions

What does System Leadership mean for the VCSE in County Durham?

What are the opportunities and challenges it brings?

What actions can we take to support the VCSE?



Information Sharing



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Close

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



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