



putting the **third sector first**

STRATEGIC PLAN 2009/2014



the centre for voluntary action



the centre for voluntary action

putting the **third**



Some definitions

In the context of this document, the term 'voluntary action' describes the activities undertaken to make a positive contribution to society by individual volunteers, active citizens, activists, and the wider third sector. BVSC uses the term 'third sector' as an inclusive one. It encompasses the breadth and diversity of voluntary action in Birmingham, and includes: voluntary organisations; community groups; charities; faith groups engaged in voluntary and social action; non-profit initiatives; and social enterprise organisations.

sector first

STRATEGIC PLAN 2009/2014

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Welcome to BVSC's Strategic Plan

In this document, we proudly present our five-year Strategic Plan 2009-2014. Over the pages which follow, you will find details of BVSC's four strategic goals, and the outcomes we will work towards throughout the life of this plan in order to ensure that Birmingham's third sector is at the forefront of building strong social capital and delivering excellent services to those who need them most.

We also outline our vision, values and mission – the beliefs, ideas and motivations which impel us to continue to work hard on behalf of Birmingham's thriving and diverse third sector.

This plan is underpinned by a more detailed three-year business plan, which outlines exactly how we intend to work towards the achievement of these outcomes. The business plan is renewed on an annual basis in order to take full account of any changes in the environment in which we operate. Updates to the plan will be available from BVSC annually, and will be published on our website at www.bvsc.org

We gratefully acknowledge the efforts of our members, partners, funders, volunteers, trustees, staff and colleagues across all sectors, and thank them for their invaluable and ongoing contributions to BVSC's achievements – now and in the future.

Jacqui Francis Chair **Brian Carr** Chief Executive



Our vision, values, and mission

BVSC's **vision** is that everybody benefits from and contributes to an inclusive, empowering, and vibrant Birmingham.

Our **mission** is to unleash the power of voluntary action to deliver sustained benefits for Birmingham and its diverse communities.

We **believe** in:

- An independent, effective and sustainable third sector
- Voluntary action as a positive force for social change
- Equality and social justice
- Tackling discrimination and poverty
- All individuals and communities having a voice and access to excellent opportunities
- Effective consultation, collaboration and partnership across all sectors to achieve mutual goals
- Challenge, risk-taking, and innovation
- Working towards providing ethical and environmentally friendly resources and services.

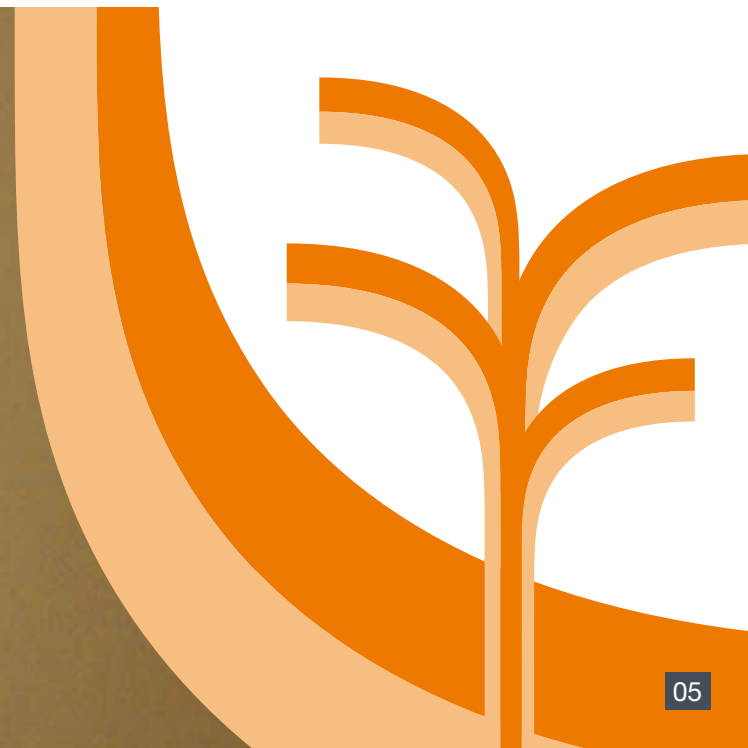
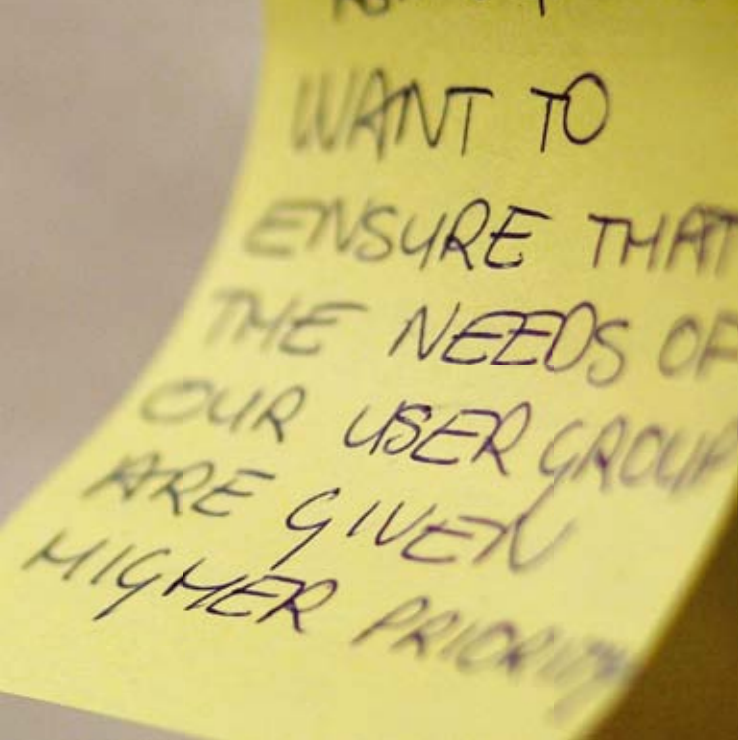


Our strategic goals

We aim to ensure that:

- Active and empowered citizens have diverse opportunities to make a positive difference
- Independent, effective and sustainable third sector organisations have the skills, knowledge and resources to achieve their aims
- The third sector is influential as a force for positive change in Birmingham and beyond
- BVSC is an independent, effective, inclusive and sustainable organisation.

To find out more about our goals, turn the page.






Goal 1 | Active and empowered citizens have diverse opportunities to make a positive difference

We will work towards ensuring that:

- The third sector makes an influential contribution to the tackling worklessness agenda in Birmingham, by providing a diverse range of opportunities for unemployed citizens to make a contribution
- All Birmingham citizens have access to excellent and inclusive volunteering information and brokerage services
- All third sector organisations in the city have access to excellent and inclusive volunteer management support services
- All third sector organisations in the city are enabled to reflect the full range of their services users' experiences in order to influence the strategic and operational management of the city towards equity and inclusiveness.

For example, we will:

- Further develop and implement our Volunteering Into Employment project, in order to provide the long-term unemployed with the skills, experience, and references necessary to assist them into the world of work
- Support the building of social capital in the city by supporting and creating opportunities for active citizens to make a positive difference.




Goal 2 | Independent, effective and sustainable third sector organisations have the skills, knowledge and resources to achieve their aims

We will work towards ensuring that:

- Agencies providing third sector infrastructure support (regardless of their sector of origin) work collaboratively and strategically to provide seamless, accessible, effective and appropriate third sector support services in all areas of the city
- Third sector organisations in all areas of the city have access to seamless, accessible, effective and appropriate infrastructure support services
- Third sector organisations in all areas of the city have access to a range of high quality directly delivered corporate and shared service functions which enable them to focus their resources on their organisational and charitable aims
- Third sector organisations in all areas of the city have access to a range of high quality specialist services and resources enabling them to maximise their impact and sustainability.

For example, we will:

- Extend the coverage and quality of Local Development Agency Network activities in all areas of the city, particularly those which have the greatest gaps in third sector support
- Work to create opportunities for third sector organisations to explore a range of appropriate business models to support them through the economic downturn and recovery, including the provision of advice and support around collaboration, merger, consortia working and social enterprise.



Goal 3 | The third sector is influential as a force for positive change in Birmingham and beyond

We will work towards ensuring that:

- The Third Sector Assembly and associated networks have a significant influence in setting policy and practice within the city, and enhance effective cross-sector communication and collaboration
- Comprehensive, current and relevant intelligence on the shape, nature, and impact of voluntary action throughout Birmingham is consistently available in order to enable effective strategic planning by the third sector and its public sector partners
- Public and private sector partners are fully equipped to engage effectively and equitably with the third sector, and are consistently held to account for doing so
- The third sector effectively articulates the experiences of its service users in a manner which positively influences public policy and practice, and which improves the quality of life for the citizens of Birmingham.

For example, we will:

- Extend the membership and diversity of the Third Sector Assembly, by specifically engaging with under-represented and smaller third sector groups
- Work with the full range of public sector agencies to promote fair and equitable commissioning of public services through the third sector.



Goal 4 | BVSC is an independent, effective, inclusive and sustainable organisation

We will work towards ensuring that:

- BVSC is accountable and responsive to a proactive and diverse membership
- BVSC is recognised as an exemplar support resource for the third sector and its partners, as a champion for voluntary action, and as an outstanding repository of third sector information, intelligence and history
- BVSC is innovative in its responses to new needs and challenges, enterprising in its income-generation activities, and committed to continuously improving its ways of working
- BVSC actively promotes the work and achievements of the wider third sector, and its own work and achievements.

For example, we will:

- Develop and launch a revised 'member benefits' package, and implement an extensive membership drive in order to extend the size, reach, and diversity of our membership throughout the city
- Develop and promote tools and resources which can be used to demonstrate the impact of third sector activity in the city.

Got some time
and energy
to spare?

You
could do
something
amazing
with it!

 Volunteer Centre
Birmingham

The context

The importance of voluntary action

Two key principles sit at the heart of everything that BVSC does: firstly, that voluntary action plays an essential role at the heart of a healthy and inclusive society; and secondly, that voluntary action needs to be supported and nurtured in order that it can thrive and reach its fullest potential.

Whether motivated by past personal experience, political commitment, a deeply-held faith, a sense of outrage at injustice in the world, a philanthropic world-view, attachment to a cause, a desire to give something back, or a simple wish to make the best use of one's free time, voluntary action – unlike anything else – can bring together diverse sets of individuals and institutions to work collectively for the common good.

In fact, voluntary action transforms lives. It is largely because of volunteers – people who didn't wait to be told to tackle the injustices they saw, but who took the initiative of working towards the changes they desired – that attitudes to a whole host of important issues have been changed for the better. Volunteers and active citizens have been active and influential in improving race relations; strengthening children's care; championing women's rights; campaigning for understanding of global health issues such as HIV and AIDS; fighting to preserve the environment; lobbying for equality in terms of sexuality, gender, and disability... the list goes on, and it is inspiring. Clearly, voluntary action is as relevant today as it ever was, and it can effect radical change.



Supporting the sector

The vast range of groups and organisations which are formed from the efforts of volunteers in this country are collectively described by various terms: ‘voluntary sector’; ‘community sector’; ‘the social economy’; ‘social enterprises’; ‘non-profit sector’; ‘non-governmental sector’ and ‘third sector’.

At BVSC, we favour this last term, not because we believe that our sector sits behind the public and private sectors, in ‘third place’, but rather because the term ‘third sector’ is an inclusive one which can embrace the full breadth and diversity of groups created from voluntary action: constituted voluntary organisations; registered charities; locally-focused community groups; faith groups engaged in voluntary and social action; non-profit agencies; and social enterprise organisations.

In fact, BVSC’s work – as highlighted by the title of this strategic plan – is about putting the third sector (and the people it serves) first.



Voluntary action in today's world

Despite being in a relatively prosperous part of the world, the gap between rich and poor continues to widen in Birmingham. Unemployment remains above the national average. Poverty continues to blight the lives of individuals and communities, contributing to a range of social ills including poor health, sub-standard educational achievement, less-than-affordable and often less than high-quality housing; and scenes of significant civil unrest.

Inequality persists. Over 70% of the black and minority ethnic population reside in the most deprived wards in the city. Women in comparable jobs to men earn just 76% of the salaries of their male counterparts. Lesbians and gay men are up to six times more likely to commit suicide than on average. Many people in Birmingham's communities feel they have little say in the way their local environment is managed. Sadly, these are just some examples of the type of injustices that third sector groups regularly set out to tackle – and all of these examples held true, even before the significant economic downturn which is so much in the public consciousness at the time of writing.

The third sector has a formidable track record of tackling society's ills with up-front and innovative approaches to social change. However, it cannot do this alone, and increasingly we need to examine the essential but sometimes delicate alliance between the third sector and the government which provides the bulk of its funding, in order to ensure that alliance is bringing added value to state, sector, and society.

Government's growing interest in the third sector

The state's interest in the third sector has grown dramatically in recent years. Alarmed by tumbling voter turnout and widespread loss of confidence in civic institutions, all the major political parties have come to regard active citizenship and community engagement (and the third sector's ability to facilitate both) as essential components in the state's quest for civil renewal.

Concurrently, the government at a local level is focusing on the sector's role as a potential partner in public service delivery. As a result, renewed third sector commissioning arrangements are being introduced at local authority level, with other public sector agencies likely to follow suit. The manner in which this agenda is administered will have far-reaching consequences for the third sector in the city, and – most importantly – for the people which the sector serves. Fair approaches to funding arrangements and the commissioning and procurement of third sector services are essential if the state-sector partnership is to bear real and lasting fruit.

Local Area Agreements commit government and its strategic partners to working closely with the third sector to achieve tangible outcomes for people in the city. In Birmingham, the Local Area Agreement lists increased civic participation, and support for a thriving third sector amongst its targets. Given this, providing effective support to the third sector needs to include providing constructive support to government in its efforts to engage more effectively with the third sector; and challenging government robustly and resolutely when it fails in those efforts.

The background features a stylized tree on the right with orange and light orange branches. On the left, there are green curved shapes resembling another tree or foliage. In the upper center, a blurred logo with the letters 'BVSC' is visible. The overall design is clean and modern with a focus on nature-inspired elements.

Independence is essential

This increased interest by government brings the third sector great opportunities, and considerable threats. Motivated by a natural desire to create and preserve essential services, the sector can often feel its independence threatened as it shifts its priorities in order to attract much-needed resources. Mission drift is a very real risk for all but the most established and independently-funded of third sector bodies. Indeed, the focus on public service delivery is now so intense, it risks eclipsing those other key characteristics which most define voluntary action – independence, innovation, and initiative.

BVSC believes that the critical challenge for the third sector in today's environment is to engage proactively in the public service delivery agenda as a true partner, whilst preserving and building on its unique and independent strengths. Given this analysis, BVSC's role in the city becomes clearer.



Creating social capital

The third sector's ability to build relationships – both individual and collective – within society, is an absolutely critical one in today's pressurised environment. In Birmingham, BVSC has been at the forefront of facilitating the third sector's contribution to the delivery of the city's Local Area Agreement, and its associated targets of building community cohesion, tackling worklessness, and improving health. As we move forward, our efforts will continue to focus on ensuring that the third sector – in conjunction with partners from the public and private sectors – creates and sustains a range of ways in which individuals can come together with a common purpose, tackling the hardest problems facing our communities, and in ways which benefit the participants as well as the recipients of voluntary action. There is no doubt that voluntary action can build social capital, cultivating good will, fellowship, sympathy and social intercourse, and demonstrating – time and again – that when people come together to make the world a better place, the results are often greater than the sum of the parts.



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www.assembly3.org.uk



BVSC's role: supporting a thriving third sector

We are passionately committed to ensuring that voluntary action can thrive, and make a positive difference for all the communities and individuals in Birmingham. We strive to support and champion voluntary action and the interests of the third sector by providing direct support to volunteers, voluntary groups, and active citizens, and by working strategically and collaboratively with partner agencies from the private, public, and third sectors. Our ethos is one of service – to the individuals, groups, and institutions that want to use their energy and efforts to do something positive for themselves and others.

We are committed to enabling the development of a strong local and citywide infrastructure for Birmingham's third sector, whilst ensuring that the sector has a strong influence in the strategic management of the city. As the premier third sector infrastructure support body in Birmingham, BVSC seeks to collaborate with partners across all sectors to place the power of voluntary action at the heart of the city.

Our achievements

Although we are very aware that a great deal remains to be done in terms of supporting a thriving third sector in Birmingham, we are also immensely proud of the fact that we have achieved what we set out to achieve in our Strategic Plan 2006-09, *Voluntary Action – Positive Progress*:

- The re-launch of Volunteer Centre Birmingham as a one-stop walk-in service for active citizens and community groups, resulting in a 74% increase in use of the service;
- Establishing and facilitating the Third Sector Assembly, a wide-ranging association of new, existing, and future third sector networks, which has already had a significant impact in raising the profile of third sector voices and views across the city;
- Brokering significant and ongoing joint working between the City Council and the Voluntary Sector Chief Executives' Forum to improve the local authority's ability to commission services from third sector agencies;
- Strongly influencing the development of the Every Child Matters agenda, and the third sector's role within it, through the creation - with third sector partners, the City Council, and the Children's Trust – of the VCS Matters Delivery Partnership;
- The adoption of a more strategic approach to volunteering with partner agencies, and beginning the process of developing Birmingham's Active Citizenship & Volunteering Strategy on behalf of the Be Birmingham strategic partnership;
- Leading on the writing of the city's Thriving Third Sector Delivery Plan as part of the Local Area Agreement;
- Leading a successful tender to write the Birmingham Social Capital and Enterprise Programme, with the city's ChangeUp and Social Economy Consortia;
- The bringing together of agencies focusing on improving local third sector infrastructure by taking a lead role in partnership work and income generation with the Local Development Agencies Network, the ChangeUp Consortium, and the City Council;
- Maximising resources coming into Birmingham's third sector by developing and brokering strategic partnerships with a range of infrastructure funders including Capacitybuilders and the Big Lottery Fund;
- Establishing a capacity and repository for third sector intelligence and information in our Policy and Communications Team;
- Championing and facilitating third sector engagement in the Local Area Agreement by ensuring that the sector's views were fed into the process of drawing up the new agreement, and leading on the creation of Birmingham's first Thriving Third Sector Delivery Plan within it;
- The development of our Centre for Voluntary Action building in Digbeth as a resource to third sector organisations, with refurbished and extended drop-in, conferencing, and tenancy space;
- The securing of BVSC's sustainability with a leaner, more focused organisational structure, and significantly strengthened core funding contractual arrangements.

1 Accountability

Clearly defined responsibilities for all decisions and actions

2 Equality

Place equality, diversity and inclusiveness at the core of what you do

3 Leadership

The sector's representatives will need to think and act strategically

4 Openness

Be as open as possible to challenge and relations

6 Sustainability

Ensuring the sector's long-term success

Looking to the future: Strategic Plan 2009-2014

At BVSC, we believe that the point of power is always in the present moment. Looking backwards is only useful if we're doing so in order to learn from past experiences and forging a positive and productive future direction. Despite acknowledging significant positive progress since 2006, we are now firmly focused on what still needs to be done, and in getting on with it.

There is much to be done:

- The need to make the 'thriving third sector' indicator in the Local Area Agreement meaningful for the sector;
- The importance of building and sustaining strong local third sector infrastructure at a neighbourhood level in partnership with our public sector partners;
- The opportunities to enhance our recent successes in significantly increasing the sector's leverage in the Every Child Matters agenda by replicating this across all social policy environments;
- The rapidly increasing need to demonstrate the power of voluntary action and the third sector in tackling worklessness and improving learning;
- The growing opportunity to show how the sector can facilitate individuals to make a contribution, and communities to be engaged;
- The requirement to work with the accelerating commissioning agenda to protect the sector's interests and opportunities;
- The chance to engage with devolving and increasingly personalised health services to tackle inequalities at their root causes.

The agenda we face is far from small, and our aspirations are ambitious.

Your BVSC, our thanks

We exist because the third sector exists. Our purpose is to serve that sector, and the people that it, in turn, seeks to serve. We set forth on the next stage of our efforts with confidence, humility, and a deep sense of gratitude for your continued support and partnership.





the centre for voluntary action

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