

An aerial photograph of York, England, showing a dense cluster of historic stone buildings with red-tiled roofs. A bridge crosses a river in the lower part of the image. The sky is overcast with grey clouds.

yorkcvs

2021-26

Strategic Plan

York Centre for Voluntary Service (York CVS)

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Summary

York CVS works in four key areas:

1. As a membership body for voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations, we bring together, support and represent voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations that are active in York
2. We promote and celebrate volunteering
3. We reduce inequality through social action
4. We work alongside many other people and organisations to improve life in York.

Priorities for the five years 2021 to 2026 are to:

- support our members by providing information, advice, training, networking and representation
- promote volunteering of all kinds, from one-off opportunities to long-term links
- tackle the causes of poverty in York
- tackle loneliness and encourage a sense of community
- help people stay well and feel well.

To support our aims, we will:

- promote equality, diversity and opportunities for all, in everything we do
- reach out to people with direct, first-hand experience and together find the best ways to make a real and lasting difference: we will co-design, co-produce, co-deliver and empower.
- work in partnership: we can only deliver this plan by working closely with our members and with partners in the public and private sectors.

First year priorities include:

- review the city-wide volunteer strategy *People Helping People* and co-produce a new strategy for the next five years
- develop ideas for recognising volunteering in York and look for sponsors for a high-profile annual celebration
- publish a report on volunteering in York
- establish a *Poverty Truth Commission*, comprising equal numbers of local decision-makers and York residents with direct experience of the impact of poverty: together, Commissioners will develop actions to tackle the causes of poverty in York.

- listen to what people say about their own experience of loneliness and – together – agree actions to reduce loneliness and boost the sense of community.
- co-design innovative services for people with multiple complex needs.

Background

Our constitution

York CVS was established in 1939. Our constitution allows us to:

(a) work for the benefit of the City of York and its environs, and, in particular, by quickening the spirit of fellowship and social service and undertaking and assisting in social work and activities, and the promotion of social welfare of every kind in the said City and its environs.

(b) initiate, promote and assist any schemes, enterprises or activities for the benefit of the inhabitants of the said City and its environs, or otherwise calculated to advance the practice of good citizenship.

(c) promote, assist and encourage the advancement of education in the City of York and its environs and especially on matters concerning social welfare.

(d) recruit, support and broker opportunities for volunteers; to assist them in doing such volunteering, and to act as a focus for personal service for the public good.

(e) provide information and advice for those who may be in need of it and to act as the neighbourly counsellor and helper of any persons who may be in difficulty or distress.

We define York as the area covered by City of York Council. Our constitution also allows us to ‘co-operate with other charities, voluntary bodies and statutory authorities and to exchange information and advice with them’. This means we can co-operate with bodies that operate across a wider area than York alone, such as national charities, York and North Yorkshire Local Enterprise Partnership and Humber, Coast and Vale Integrated Care Partnership.

What this means in practice

Our work can be grouped into four key areas:

1. as a membership body for voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations, we bring together, support and represent voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations (VCSOs) that are active in York
2. we promote and celebrate volunteering
3. we reduce inequality through social action
4. we work alongside many other people and organisations to improve life in York

Our work is funded by grants and contracts, and by generating income from our assets – particularly our premises in Priory Street – and by charging fees for some services.

Our strategic review

We launched a strategic review in August 2020 when two events were held for staff and trustees. We then sent out a survey to seek our members' views on priorities for the next five years. Next, we identified four areas for more detailed discussion:

1. volunteering
2. the causes of poverty
3. loneliness and sense of community
4. health and wellbeing

Early in 2021, we held focus groups on each of these areas. A fifth focus group brought the threads together and helped us shape ambitions and ideas for the next five years.

Consultees want York CVS to build on the support we already provide to VCSOs in York. Through the consultation process, we heard a lot of ideas for developing our services over the coming years.

Similarly, everyone agreed that we should continue to promote and encourage volunteering. As ever, we need to work with members and partners on this, and to make sure we reach out to all neighbourhoods and communities. There was also a strong desire to recognise and celebrate the contribution volunteers make to life in York.

These are the best-developed aspects of our plan, because we will be building on things we already do to support the sector and promote volunteering. In addition, there is already a city-wide volunteering strategy, *People Helping People*, which – with our partners – we will review and refresh over the first year of this plan.

Action is already being taken on poverty, loneliness, health and wellbeing, too. There are plans and strategies in place, some of them – rightly – led by partners in the NHS and City of York Council. We are proud to be part of existing forums and networks, and to support the [York Human Rights City Declaration](#).

However, this plan marks a shift in emphasis for York CVS. We will still encourage and support social action in its broadest sense – as we always have – but we now propose to focus particularly on poverty, loneliness, sense of community, health and wellbeing.

Later sections of this plan explore each priority in turn. In practice, though, they overlap and intersect. Poverty, loneliness and poor health can affect any one of us at different points in our lives, sometimes all at the same time. Intersectionality doesn't just add to the challenges people may face: it multiplies them.

On the other side of the coin, volunteering can help reduce the sense of loneliness, boost community connections and improve health and wellbeing.

The focus groups sent clear messages not just about what York CVS should do in these areas, but how we should do it. In particular, we should:

- promote equality, diversity and opportunities for all, in everything we do
- reach out to people with direct, first-hand experience and *together* find the best ways to make a real and lasting difference: in other words, we must co-design, co-produce, co-deliver and empower
- help people be heard – amplify voices, don't filter them
- make it easier for people to get all the help they need, at the time they need it. Co-locating services – including at Priory Street – would improve access for some people with multiple or complex challenges
- encourage collaboration across the public, private and voluntary sectors
- collect and share evidence, drawing on good practice around the UK and beyond, as well as in York itself
- tell compelling stories about people, their lives and their experiences
- define the difference we want to make, and measure it
- **BE BOLD!**

We can't and won't do any of this alone. One of the most exciting aspects of the consultation was hearing people talk about their own role in achieving the ambitions set out here. ***We're in this together.***

Voluntary action

We want a city where everyone has a chance to volunteer, where many people volunteer often, and where the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector makes a positive difference to lives, communities and the challenges facing us in the 21st century.

York has an enviable reputation both for voluntary action and partnership working.

Vast numbers of people give their time and energy to help a neighbour, organise activities, run clubs and societies, or volunteer for local and national charities.

York CVS currently has over 250 members, representing every type of voluntary and community organisation from informal groups to registered charities and social enterprises. Our members are at the heart of what we do: they shape our plans, guide our work and create a sense of shared purpose and values.

In return, we help mobilise the strength and purpose of our members. We bring them together to share ideas, experience and ambitions. We keep them informed, represent them externally, share evidence about the difference they make and tell their stories. We provide training, host networks, give practical assistance, offer office and conference space and make connections.

Over the next five years, we will:

- promote volunteering of all kinds, from one-off opportunities to long-term links
- identify unmet needs and ways to meet them
- strengthen the civic impact of volunteering by encouraging consistently high quality opportunities for volunteers
- persistently promote equality and diversity in volunteering
- help our members:
 - recruit volunteers
 - meet regulatory requirements, including advice on DBS and safeguarding checks
 - use our digital volunteer management system to maintain secure records
- collect and share facts, figures and stories which show how people benefit from volunteering – including volunteers themselves
- show how volunteering helps organisations of all kinds and sizes achieve their aims

- build links with employers to signpost volunteering opportunities
- recognise and celebrate volunteering
- help York's VCSE sector to maintain close links with City of York Council, the NHS, other public sector organisations and businesses
- broker opportunities for VCISOs to access funding and play a bigger part in the city's plans
- use our knowledge and expertise to inform public policy locally, regionally and nationally
- listen to members' views and their ideas for improving our work.

Throughout every year, we will share stories about the benefits of volunteering, the difference it makes and its impact on people's lives. We will take every opportunity to tell these stories in person, online and in print.

At the end of every year, our annual report will describe the difference we have made to people and communities, alongside information about (among other things):

- volunteer opportunities we helped to advertise and fill
- members' use of the volunteer database
- advice provided to members on DBS, safeguarding and other regulatory requirements
- training and development opportunities we have offered
- information and advice provided to current and potential members on starting and running voluntary organisations and social enterprises.
- new and continuing peer-to-peer networks
- the use of Priory Street office space and meeting rooms
- how we have informed, involved and consulted our members
- the way we have connected the voluntary sector with public and private sector partners in York
- the stories we have told about volunteers and voluntary action, and where we have told them
- diversity in volunteering
- how we have used our knowledge and expertise to inform public policy locally, regionally and nationally
- the difference York's voluntary sector is making to social issues, opportunities for all and a sustainable future, both on its own initiative and in partnership with public and private sector partners.

In 2021-22, we will:

- review the city-wide volunteer strategy *People Helping People* and co-produce a new shared strategy for the next five years
- develop ideas for recognising volunteering in York and look for sponsors for a high-profile annual celebration, aiming to hold the first celebration during Volunteers Week 2022
- explore ways to collect and share evidence about voluntary action
- publish a report on volunteering in York (target date, Volunteers Week 2022), covering:
 - a brief profile of the city and its people as context
 - the extent and nature of voluntary action in York
 - the nature, diversity and contribution of volunteers in York
 - how volunteering has evolved in recent years
 - challenges and opportunities facing volunteers and voluntary organisations in the years ahead
 - what people say about volunteering – why they volunteer (or don't), what they like about it, and any changes they'd like to see
 - examples of good practice, ideas and innovation in York and beyond
 - unmet needs, gaps and overlaps in provision, and ideas for improvement.

Social action

Poverty

We want to be part of a plan to eliminate poverty in York.

We want everyone in the city to have enough money to put food on the table and live in warm, safe homes. To be able to get out and about, with easy access to transport and the online world. To feel part of their neighbourhood and the wider world. To have work and be paid fairly for it – and to know that if we're out of work, can't work or are retired, we'll still be secure. To have easy access to help, information and support whenever we need it, including – of course – excellent health and social care. To have great education and training for our children and lifelong learning for ourselves.

There's already a lot of really great work going on to alleviate poverty in York. Food banks have made an incredible contribution, alongside many other groups and charities such as the Salvation Army and York Community Furniture Store. We need to support their work while, at the same time, tackling the underlying *causes* of poverty.

There is also action to tackle the causes of poverty. One of the themes adopted by the York Human Rights City partnership is “Equality and non-discrimination: the right to a decent standard of living”. A report published in 2020, [Covid-19 and Human Rights](#), revealed that Covid-19 had exacerbated existing inequalities, reinforcing the need for urgent action.

We will start by supporting a Poverty Truth Commission. This is a chance for decision-makers and opinion-formers to hear directly from York residents who know what it’s like to live on a low income, to be in and out of work, to face the uncertainty of a zero-hours contract, to live in a damp or unsafe flat – in short, people who have become *experts by experience*. Working together on equal terms, members of the Commission will develop actions to tackle the causes of poverty in York.

Future plans must be bold. National and local action is needed to:

- boost income from work
- boost job security, including the gig economy and self-employment
- ensure people claim what they’re entitled to
- ensure everyone can access affordable housing, transport and digital services
- eliminate homelessness
- provide access to affordable credit
- provide advice and support when people need it – for example, to change careers, to take on a new role as a carer, or to prepare for retirement
- encourage mutual aid
- make it easy to get information and advice
- provide outstanding education and care for all our children and young people
- enable people to build new skills and expertise throughout their lives
- improve health, care and wellbeing
- tackle loneliness and build community spirit
- measure impact over time.

Our partners in the public sector – schools, colleges, City of York Council, the NHS, Jobcentre Plus and others – already play a huge part in tackling poverty. Many employers commit to good employment practice, including flexible and part-time

working for people who need it, and guarantee to pay at least the Real Living Wage. There is a big role for the VCSE sector too, ranging from housing associations to the Citizens' Advice Bureau, from play groups to Age UK and from volunteer drivers to credit unions.

York CVS will help make connections. For example, if the Poverty Truth Commission asks us to, we will help make introductions, organise meetings, liaise with partners, collate material and provide admin support.

Once the plan to tackle the causes of poverty is in place, York CVS will be a noisy friend. We'll continue to help people tell their stories. We'll look out for unmet needs and gaps (and overlaps) in provision, push for more and faster action, monitor progress, and uphold the principles of co-design, co-production, co-delivery and empowerment.

Loneliness and sense of community

We want to be part of a plan to tackle the epidemic of loneliness and encourage a real sense of community in local neighbourhoods and across the whole of York.

The two issues overlap, but aren't identical. People can feel lonely even if they are active in their community. Conversely, people who are socially isolated from their community are not necessarily lonely. Sadly, though, some people are both lonely and isolated.

Studies quoted in the North Yorkshire loneliness strategy, *Be Social, Be Well*, reported links between loneliness and health outcomes, such as higher rates of depression and cognitive decline. Loneliness can affect sleep patterns and self-esteem, too. Social isolation can also have an effect on people's health and wellbeing.

Loneliness can affect people at any stage of their life, from childhood to old age. Events and transitions in someone's life can increase feelings of loneliness: examples include losing a sense of community after leaving school, college or university, moving to a new city, redundancy, retirement, the end of a relationship, living in an abusive relationship, being a victim of crime, and bereavement.

People can feel disconnected from their communities for a variety of reasons. Again, they might have moved to a new area; or they might feel nervous, unsafe or discriminated against. It is important to add that people can also feel isolated if their

mobility is restricted for any reason – including lack of access to transport – or don't have access to digital and online services. On the other hand, social media can actually increase some people's sense of isolation.

There is a lot already happening to reduce loneliness, build meaningful connections and promote a sense of community of York. York CVS is proud to host the *Ways to Wellbeing* and *Link Worker Social Prescribing* services. Other examples include Good Gym, York Men's Shed, York Carers' Centre, Move the Masses and befriending services offered by Age UK and others. The Covid-19 pandemic also brought out the best in local communities, with thousands of people reaching out to help their neighbours. The key is to go further still by building capacity within communities and sharing good ideas city-wide.

As with other areas of this plan, we need to start by listening to what people say about their own experience of loneliness and their ideas for the future. As with other parts of this strategy, co-production is key.

We then need to set out shared ambitions for reducing loneliness and boosting the sense of community, which will guide and inform both our own plans and the contributions made by our partners. We will take stock of what is already happening, share evidence, establish baselines and identify new opportunities. We can learn from – and connect with – national programmes and sources of information, such as [the Connection Coalition](#) and the [Campaign to End Loneliness](#) as well as pioneering initiatives in Acomb and New Earswick led by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust. Importantly, our future plans must be based on these principles: co-design, co-develop, co-deliver and empower.

Plans need to:

- recognise that people belong to many communities: their street, neighbourhood and city; communities of identity – LGBT+, disabilities and long-term conditions, age, faith, race, ethnicity, first language and so on; and communities of interest – sport, pastimes, skills, employment. There is no “one size fits all”
- offer support that makes a lasting difference, and keep in touch over time: one-off interventions aren't enough
- constantly encourage kindness
- eliminate stigma and prejudice
- build capacity – help people help themselves and others, create more peer support and encourage intergenerational projects

- make the most of local assets including green spaces and community buildings
- increase access to transport and digital/online services
- promote health and wellbeing
- make connections with services that people use in times of transition, including letting agents, solicitors, family advice groups, funeral services and GPs
- connect with other plans, including public health strategies and York's next poverty strategy
- measure impact over time

York CVS will campaign hard to combat loneliness and champion action to promote the sense of community. We will be directly involved in several ways, not least through our volunteer centre and Ways to Wellbeing, because helping people volunteer is a really valuable way to reduce loneliness and create connections. We will make sure loneliness and sense of community are priorities for city-wide forums such as the Health and Wellbeing Board, and work with public and private sector partners on their own plans in this area. We will look for unmet needs, gaps and overlaps in provision and ways to improve. We will look for evidence of impact and – as we will in other areas, too – we will tell powerful personal stories and amplify voices.

Health and wellbeing

We want to help people stay well and feel well, and to make sure people can get help with their health and wellbeing when they need it.

Our future plans in this area must support strategies developed by wider partnerships.

First, York has a [Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy](#), led by the Director of Public Health at City of York Council and the Health and Wellbeing Board. The voluntary and community sector is a key partner. The strategy is built around four themes:

- mental health and wellbeing
- starting and growing well
- living and working well
- ageing well.

Second, the Humber, Coast and Vale Integrated Care Partnership published a [long-term plan](#) in 2019 which set out four ambitions:

1. We want every child to have the best start in life

2. We want to ensure everyone has access to the right care and support that responds to their changing health needs
3. We want to support people to be independent and in control as they age
4. We want to create an environment in which people can have positive conversations about death and dying, which will help us to give them greater control and provide coordinated, compassionate care.

The Partnership brings together primary, community and mental health providers in the NHS – GPs, dentists, pharmacists, hospitals and so on – together with voluntary and community sector organisations.

VCSOs support people's health and wellbeing in many different ways: some provide support for broadly-defined groups (eg children and young people, older people, carers etc). Others support specific health conditions such as Alzheimer's and diabetes. Others again provide specialist care services – St Leonard's Hospice, for example. Some groups are entirely local while others – the Samaritans, for example – are part of national networks.

The voluntary sector also makes a huge contribution to wellbeing through sport and exercise: there are more than 200 voluntary sports and exercise groups in York. Active membership of other social groups can support wellbeing, too: community choirs, local history societies, quilting circles – all of these, and many more, help people's wellbeing – as does regular volunteering.

At the risk of over-simplifying complex data, evidence suggests that York's health is broadly average – better in some respects, worse in others. Variations tend to be driven by inequality: there are significant pockets of poverty and disadvantage across York where health outcomes are more likely to be below average. Some groups are less likely to access mainstream health services than others: examples include travellers and (particularly in relation to mental health) members of the LGBT+ community. Challenges facing the city include:

- suicide
- self-harm
- undiagnosed diabetes
- alcohol admissions
- smoking in pregnancy
- excess winter deaths

- overweight/obesity
- mental health.

The Covid-19 pandemic will also affect people's health for years to come. Some effects are direct – long Covid, bereavement and PTSD, for example – while others are indirect: some people's mental health was affected by lockdown, for example, and post-pandemic unemployment will have adverse effects on physical health, mental health and wellbeing.

York CVS is proud to host *Healthwatch York*, *Time to Change* and the *Ways to Wellbeing* and *Link Worker Social Prescribing* services. At a strategic level, we are a member of York Health and Wellbeing Board, York Health, Care and Voluntary Sector Alliance and Humber, Coast and Vale Integrated Care Partnership VCSE leadership group, among others.

Our future aims are to:

- better understand the extent of voluntary and community sector support for health and wellbeing
- identify unmet needs, gaps and overlaps in provision, and ways to improve
- capture evidence of the difference VCSOs and volunteering make to health and wellbeing
- actively encourage people to volunteer as a way to improve their health and wellbeing
- use evidence and personal stories to:
 - ensure public sector funders and providers appreciate the voluntary sector's contribution to delivering their aims
 - help VCSOs seek and secure funding
- work with NHS and other partners to co-design services, including improving services for people with multiple complex needs
- work with all our partners to reach people who don't currently take full advantage of health and wellbeing services, and help them tell their own stories
- promote co-design, co-production and co-delivery
- act as a two-way street for evidence and information – we will gather and share information with our members, and collect information from our members which we will share externally
- where appropriate, run or host specific projects ourselves.

Governance, resources, membership and sustainability

York CVS operates under the legal, regulatory and fiscal requirements which apply to registered charities in England. Our board of trustees is responsible for ensuring that these requirements are met at all times, and in particular that:

- in a typical year, income exceeds expenditure and that at all times, we remain a going concern
- we maintain sufficient reserves to cover:
 - costs known or predicted to fall due in the foreseeable future, such as repairs to buildings
 - costs that would be incurred in the unlikely event that York CVS is wound up
- we meet all regulatory requirements, including (among others) employment law, health and safety regulations, safeguarding legislation and reporting requirements
- our plans are based on reasonable assumptions and our appetite for risk
- we assess and manage operational and reputational risks
- we are fully accountable to our members
- we meet the standards set out in the [Charity Governance Code](#).

In 2021-22, we will prepare a report on our governance arrangements, using the Charity Governance Code as a template. The report will set out any steps we need to take to comply with all parts of the Code, together with a timetable for implementation. The report will be revisited and updated at least every second year.

Our strength comes in part from the strength of our member organisations. We will regularly review the services we offer and how we work with members to achieve our shared ambitions. We will report back to members on our work, consult regularly, engage constantly and nurture our shared sense of purpose and values.

We need funding to deliver the ambitions set out in this plan. We will continue to apply for grants and contracts which support these ambitions. We won't apply for funds that do not support our ambitions, or which may distract us from our principal aims. Nor will we bid to deliver projects or services if other VCISOs are better placed to deliver them: we will help our members, not compete with them.

We will make the best possible use of our main capital asset, the Priory Street Centre (PSC). We lease the PSC from City of York Council on a peppercorn rent. As a set of listed, Victorian buildings, the PSC needs a lot of regular care and maintenance. We will also set aside funds for repairs and improvements needed only infrequently, such as replacing the roof.

We will generate income from the PSC in three ways:

- VCSOs license the exclusive use of specific rooms as office and meeting space
- rooms in the conference centre are offered for hire by the day, half-day or hour for conferences, meetings and events
- co-location space allows people from different organisations and agencies to work alongside one another, for example to support people with multiple complex needs.

We will charge fees for some services, such as training courses and access to our volunteering database software.

We could not operate without our wonderful staff and volunteers. Priorities for the future include:

- regular salary benchmarking
- nurturing a culture that embraces and celebrates diversity
- making sure appraisal and feedback arrangements – both formal and informal – recognise the vital contribution people make to our success, and link to their own future plans
- identifying and providing opportunities for training and professional development
- capturing and responding to feedback, for example through staff surveys
- consulting staff and volunteers on plans and keeping them regularly informed
- drawing on best practice to support staff and volunteers' health and wellbeing
- succession planning.

We will review our environmental management policies at regular intervals and do everything we can to reduce our carbon footprint. This won't be entirely straightforward. Our buildings in Priory Street are old. Nonetheless, we will look for ways to improve insulation and reduce energy use. We will also help staff and volunteers to reduce their carbon footprint by walking, cycling and using public transport wherever possible: private vehicles should be used only when strictly necessary. We will use local suppliers wherever possible and aim to reduce transport costs and carbon emissions when sourcing supplies.

Next steps

Once adopted, this strategic plan will be the starting point for action plans covering all the themes and ambitions set out here. We will report and consult regularly. The overall strategic plan will be reviewed twice: there will be an interim review at the end of 2023 and a full review before a new strategic plan is developed in 2026.

Thanks

We would like to thank everyone who contributed to developing this strategic plan. We were delighted that so many people gave time, energy, ideas and experience to help get this right. **Thank you!**