



Better Together Policy Forum Briefing Note

When: Friday 6th October 2023 (9:30 – 12:30)

Where: Bowburn Community Centre

Context: This is the tenth in a series of bi-annual forums, led by the VCS. They are planned to address policy themes which affect our communities. According to the theme, relevant public sector partners and commissioners will be invited to participate with our colleagues from the VCS.

The wider objectives for the Policy Forums are to:

- provide regular opportunities for the VCS 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 VCS providers to engage with the Better Together Forum, as an opportunity to 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.

Previous forums have focused on showcasing community led action, partnership working, exploring impact and actions around mental health, social prescribing, social value, alliance contracting, safeguarding, and opening the door on connecting community and health care service delivery. They have all generated a continuing discussion between voluntary and public sector partners about how we respond to the needs of people in our communities, and to the changing face of support services, now and in the future.

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

October Topic: Finding Common Ground across public and voluntary sectors on research, insight and evidence base. There is so much focus on this as a topic nationally, regionally and of course given all our work together, locally.

So many colleagues in the VCS are engaged in research or are seeking or receiving funding for 'research and engagement'. DCA are engaged with a national programme underpinned by the Young Foundation report on "[An equitable future for research and innovation](#)":

Durham County Council is committed to an assets-based approach to engagement, insight and research activity in order to better understand the needs of communities. The County Durham Partnership made a commitment to designing public services so that they prevent high volumes of needs and demand for statutory services. Whole system approaches

implemented throughout the pandemic and the emerging development of the County Durham Together Partnership is collaborating to support communities with the issues they face.

Academics have been working together across the region to shape research outcomes that support policy development for many years and Durham University has long explored the opportunities to broaden the evidence base by taking an inclusive approach through the mix of different research methodologies.

The given the aims of the policy forums are to bring public and voluntary sectors together to share thoughts and raise questions/asks (both ways).

This Policy Forum provides a perfect opportunity to open up current conversations within broader audience, and test feelings and commitments. It can be seen as a starting point for future ongoing connections.

The event is not about presenting an offer or setting out expectations but is an opportunity to put a spotlight on this important and increasingly interesting topic; there is a real desire to work together in order to improve outcomes within our communities.

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:

Are we building an evidence base for County Durham that is informed by all those working to support the wider determinant of health of our communities?

To explore:

What is the County Durham Evidence base?

Working together to build inclusive insight that informs decision making.

With roundtable discussions focussed on identifying and exploring:

- opportunities for research connections
- barriers to building better research links (*what gets in the way*)
- what does good engagement in research look like (*from all perspectives*)
- what would be meaningful (whether types of research, topics, intended purpose/use)
- what is already happening that we aren't capturing the research potential of and what would facilitate action/progress.
- evidence to demonstrate needs/gaps
- evidence to demonstrate impact