



**WIGAN BOROUGH
COMMUNITY FIRST**

Taking the Lead

Dispersed Leadership Model

Strategic Framework

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Purpose of the Model

At Wigan Borough Community First, we value the voice of the communities we serve. The Dispersed Leadership Model has been developed to ensure that individuals with the right skills, knowledge and lived experience are supported to represent the sector in a clear, structured and effective way.

The model strengthens leadership, representation and collaboration across the voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise sector within Wigan Borough. It enables leadership to be shared, ensuring that strategic priorities are informed by organisations working directly within communities.

By providing a coordinated and manageable approach to representation, the model supports the sector to influence decision making, shape priorities and contribute to system level change, without creating structures that are overly complex or difficult to operate.

This reflects a system-enabled, community-led approach, where infrastructure supports leadership to emerge from within the sector itself.

The model intentionally connects community insight with sector leadership and strategic influence, ensuring that infrastructure support is shaped by real need, rather than operating in isolation.

Why This Matters

The Dispersed Leadership Model is built on the belief that stronger connections across the sector create stronger outcomes for communities.

Too often, organisations are working hard in isolation, carrying similar challenges, navigating the same barriers and competing for limited time, resource and influence. While there is significant knowledge, experience and passion across the sector, opportunities to bring this together in a meaningful and consistent way have not always existed.

The model creates intentional space for organisations, groups and communities to come together, share insight, build relationships and identify where there are shared priorities and opportunities for collective action.

At its core, this is not simply about representation structures or meetings. It is about strengthening the sector's ability to:

- Work collaboratively rather than in isolation
- Identify and respond to shared challenges
- Build stronger partnerships and connections
- Influence decisions that affect communities
- Create more joined up and sustainable ways of working

By bringing together different perspectives, experiences and areas of expertise, the model supports new ideas, stronger collaboration and more informed decision making across the sector.

It also recognises that meaningful leadership already exists across communities and organisations. The role of the model is not to centralise leadership, but to create the conditions for it to be shared, connected and amplified.

Through this approach, the sector is better placed not only to respond to challenges collectively, but to shape long term change together.

How the Model Works (Simplified Overview)

The Dispersed Leadership Model creates a clear route from community insight to system influence.

In practice:

- Insight is shared across the VCFSE Collective, including networks, forums and thematic spaces
- Sector Leadership Groups bring this together, identifying common themes and priorities
- Representatives take these priorities into the Voluntary Sector Leadership Board
- Priorities are shared into wider system conversations and decision-making spaces
- Updates and outcomes are fed back across the sector

This ensures that while not everyone sits at decision making tables, everyone has a clear route to influence.

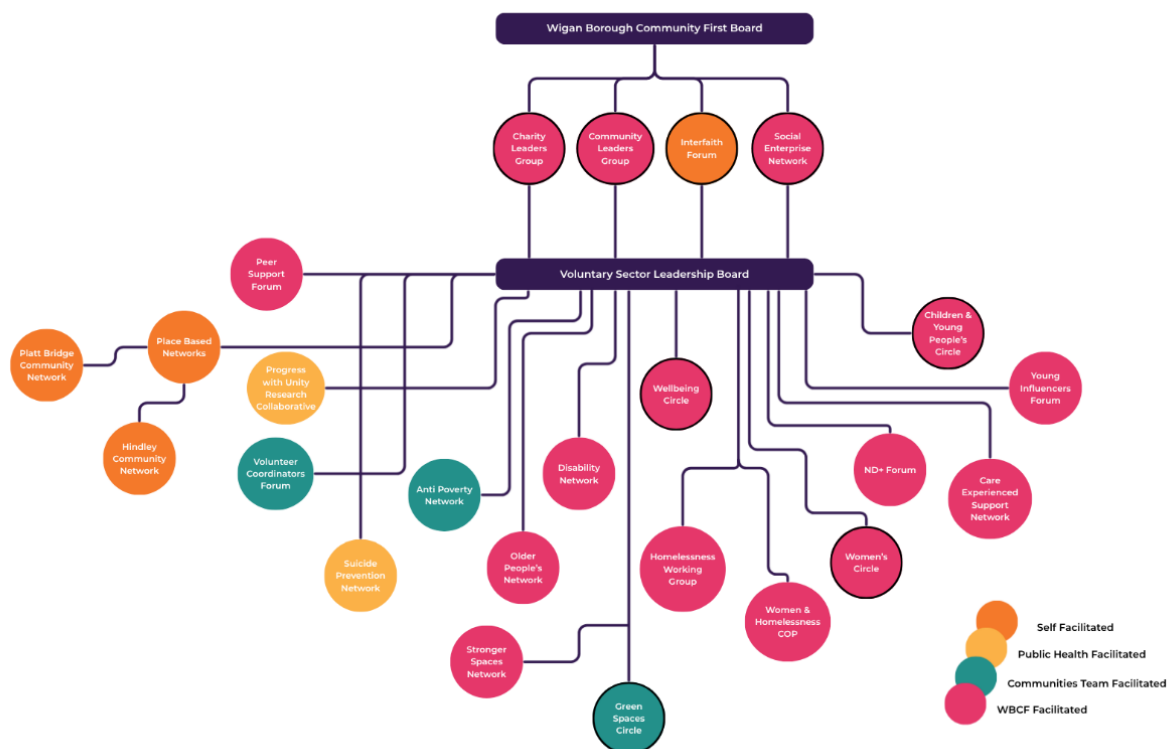
Structure of the Model

The Dispersed Leadership Model is built as a connected structure that enables wide participation while maintaining clear and manageable routes into strategic influence.

The model is made up of four key layers:

- The VCFSE Collective
- Sector Leadership Groups
- Voluntary Sector Leadership Board (VSLB)
- WBCF Board and wider system engagement

Each layer within the model has a distinct role, working together to create a clear route from insight to influence.



The VCFSE Collective is where insight is generated, grounded in lived experience and frontline delivery. This is then brought together through Sector Leadership Groups, where shared themes and priorities begin to take shape across the sector.

The Voluntary Sector Leadership Board provides a space for this to be explored at a strategic level, ensuring that priorities are aligned and focused. From there, WBCF and wider system partners use this collective understanding to inform decision making and influence at a system level.

This creates a consistent and connected pathway, where insight is not only gathered, but shaped and used to drive meaningful change.

VCFSE Collective

The VCFSE Collective forms the foundation of the Dispersed Leadership Model. It brings together the full range of groups, networks, forums, thematic circles and partnerships across the VCFSE sector.

This includes:

- Thematic Circles
- Networks and forums
- Working groups and partnerships
- Informal and emerging collaborations

The Collective provides the primary space for:

- Sharing insight and intelligence from across the sector
- Identifying emerging needs, challenges and opportunities
- Exploring key themes and areas of focus
- Strengthening collaboration and partnership working
- Contributing to the development of sector priorities

The VCFSE Collective ensures that leadership within the model is grounded in lived experience, frontline delivery and community need.

It also provides an important space for relationship building, peer support and shared leadership. Recognising that trust, connection and mutual understanding are critical to effective collaboration and system influence.

Thematic Circles play a key role within the VCFSE Collective by generating insight into community need, lived experience and emerging priorities. This insight informs Sector Leadership Groups, ensuring that sector priorities and infrastructure support are shaped in response to real need rather than assumed demand.

Sector Leadership Groups

Within the VCFSE Collective, four groups are recognised as Sector Leadership Groups due to their specific role in coordinating representation and supporting governance.

These are:

- Charity Leaders Group
- Community Leaders Group
- Interfaith Forum
- Social Enterprise Network

Sector Leadership Groups act as the gateway between the wider VCFSE Collective and strategic representation.

They are responsible for:

- Actively engaging with and gathering insight from across the VCFSE Collective
- Working with a defined range of groups, networks and forums to ensure broad and inclusive representation
- Synthesising information and identifying common themes and priorities
- Developing and agreeing collective priorities or statements of intent
- Providing a structured route through which sector voice can be represented at Board level
- Translating insight from Thematic Circles and wider groups into shared sector priorities

This approach ensures that all groups have a route to influence, without requiring direct representation within Board environments.

Thematic Circles

Thematic Circles form a key part of the VCFSE Collective, bringing together organisations, groups and individuals connected by shared areas of focus, interest or community need.

They provide structured spaces for collaboration, discussion and shared learning, enabling participants to explore key themes, identify emerging issues and develop a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities within specific areas of the sector.

The primary role of Thematic Circles is to generate insight. Through regular engagement, they capture lived experience, frontline perspectives and community voice, ensuring that sector understanding is grounded in real need rather than assumption.

Thematic Circles may take a flexible and responsive approach to engagement, which may include:

- Facilitated discussions and workshops
- Thematic sessions or learning opportunities
- Collaborative problem solving
- Time-limited or project-based activity

This flexibility ensures that circles can adapt to the needs of participants and remain relevant to emerging priorities.

While Thematic Circles may support activity and collaboration, they do not operate as delivery programmes or standalone structures. Their role within the Dispersed Leadership Model is to generate and explore insight, rather than to lead, deliver or directly shape strategic priorities.

Insight generated through Thematic Circles is shared with and shaped through Sector Leadership Groups, where it is synthesised alongside wider sector input to identify shared priorities.

This ensures that:

- Community voice and lived experience are consistently reflected
- Insight is translated into collective sector priorities
- Strategic discussions are informed by a broad and representative evidence base

Through this role, Thematic Circles strengthen the connection between community experience, sector leadership and system level influence, ensuring

that infrastructure support and strategic priorities are shaped in response to real need.

While Thematic Circles play an important role in generating insight, not all discussions within these spaces are intended to move into strategic decision making. Their primary function is to explore, surface and understand issues in depth.

Where themes emerge that have relevance across multiple groups or reflect wider sector challenges, these are shared with Sector Leadership Groups. It is at this stage that insight is brought together, prioritised and translated into shared sector priorities.

This ensures that Thematic Circles remain open and exploratory, while maintaining a clear and focused route into strategic discussion.

Community Network

The Community Network provides a wider space for engagement, connection and shared learning across the sector.

Meeting biannually, it brings together participants from across the VCFSE Collective, Sector Leadership Groups and wider partnerships.

The Community Network provides an opportunity to:

- Share progress and learning
- Highlight emerging priorities and opportunities
- Test and shape ideas collectively
- Strengthen relationships and collaboration

This creates a wider platform for engagement, ensuring that insight is not only generated, but shared, amplified and acted upon. It supports transparency, visibility and collective ownership across the model.

Connection to the Leadership Structure

The model operates through a clear and consistent pathway of influence and communication:

- Insight is generated across the VCFSE Collective, including Thematic Circles, networks and forums
- Sector Leadership Groups gather, synthesise and translate this insight into shared priorities
- Representatives bring these priorities into VSLB and WBCF Board discussions
- Feedback, updates and outcomes are shared back across the sector

This creates a continuous and transparent flow of information, ensuring that sector voice is consistently represented, understood and acted upon.

At its core, not everyone sits on the Board, but everyone has a route to influence.

Voluntary Sector Leadership Board

The Voluntary Sector Leadership Board provides a dedicated space for strategic discussion, collective leadership and sector influence.

It brings together representation from across the VCFSE sector in a structured and manageable way, ensuring that strategic conversations are informed by a broad range of perspectives, experiences and areas of expertise.

The purpose of the Board is to:

- Bring together sector wide insight and intelligence
- Review and shape shared priorities
- Identify key issues, challenges and opportunities
- Influence system level discussions and partnerships
- Strengthen alignment and collaboration across the sector

The Board provides a space for strategic discussion and collective leadership, rather than formal governance.

Board Composition

The Board is designed to remain small, focused and effective. Core membership includes one representative from each Sector Leadership Group.

To support breadth of perspective and ensure responsiveness to emerging priorities, the Board may be expanded where appropriate.

Additional representation may be drawn from:

- Thematic Circles
- Wider groups within the VCFSE Collective
- Specific areas of priority or expertise

The total membership of the Board will not exceed eight representatives at any one time. Any additional representation will be:

- Time limited
- Aligned to specific themes, priorities or areas of focus
- Regularly reviewed to ensure the Board remains effective

What Gets Escalated to the Voluntary Sector Leadership Board

The Board focuses on strategic issues that affect the sector as a whole.

Issues brought to the Board should:

- Affect multiple organisations or the wider sector
- Relate to infrastructure, systems or shared challenges
- Require strategic influence or collective action

Examples include:

- Funding systems and access
- Volunteer capacity and sustainability
- Governance and accountability
- Workforce and infrastructure challenges

The Board does not focus on:

- Individual organisational issues
- One-off operational challenges
- Service-specific concerns without wider relevance

Where issues are more localised, they remain within networks or thematic spaces.

Roles & Responsibilities

The Dispersed Leadership Model operates through a system enabled, community led approach, where strategic infrastructure is provided by WBCF and leadership is driven by the sector itself.

Wigan Borough Community First

WBCF acts as the system enabler within the Dispersed Leadership Model, providing the infrastructure, coordination and support required to ensure the model operates effectively and consistently. This includes facilitating communication across the VCFSE Collective, supporting representatives in their role, maintaining clear processes and ensuring that insight, priorities and information flow across the model in a structured and transparent way.

WBCF does not lead on behalf of the sector but creates the conditions for leadership to emerge from within it, enabling a system that is coordinated, connected and community led.

Within WBCF there is also a Collaborations Lead who plays a central role in coordinating the model and supporting sector representation.

The role is responsible for:

- Coordinating communication across the VCFSE Collective
- Supporting Sector Leadership Groups and representatives
- Maintaining a central overview of sector activity
- Ensuring a consistent flow of insight across the model

The role also supports wider sector representation by:

- Maintaining a central calendar of meetings, boards and events
- Supporting individuals to engage with representation opportunities
- Gathering feedback, notes and insight from across the sector
- Collating and sharing key information

This ensures that information is shared consistently across the sector, rather than held by individuals.

Voluntary Sector Leadership Board

The VSLB acts as the primary space for bringing together and shaping sector priorities. It draws on insight generated across the VCFSE Collective and shaped by Sector Leadership Groups, ensuring that discussions are informed by lived experience, frontline delivery and community need.

The Board supports the translation of these priorities into wider system conversations, influencing how the sector engages with partners, stakeholders and strategic opportunities. The VSLB operates alongside the WBCF Board at the same strategic level, with a distinct role.

While the VSLB focuses on:

- Sector leadership
- Strategic discussion
- Collective priorities

The WBCF Board is responsible for:

- Governance
- Oversight
- Organisational decision making

Representatives provide sector insight and perspective into WBCF Board discussions, but do not hold decision making authority within governance structures and do not replace or act as trustees.

This ensures a clear and appropriate boundary between representation and governance.

Representatives

Representatives ensure that sector voice is gathered, understood and shared effectively.

Representation within the model operates at different levels, reflecting the structure of the Dispersed Leadership Model.

Across the VCFSE Collective, individuals may take on a role in supporting communication and ensuring that the voice of their group is visible. Within Sector

Leadership Groups, representatives take on a more focused role in bringing together and prioritising insight, ensuring that the most relevant themes are carried into strategic discussion.

Their role is not to report everything discussed across groups, but to identify and bring forward the most relevant strategic themes.

They are responsible for:

- Gathering insight from their group and the wider sector
- Identifying common themes and priorities
- Representing collective perspectives, not individual organisations
- Contributing to strategic discussions
- Maintaining a clear two-way flow of information

To support consistency, representatives are expected to:

- Provide concise summaries of key issues
- Highlight areas requiring strategic focus
- Share updates in an accessible way

This ensures that information shared across the model remains meaningful and manageable.

Further detail on how these roles operate in practice is set out within the Operational Handbook.

Representation Framework

The Dispersed Leadership Model includes a structured and coordinated approach to representation, ensuring that the voice of the VCFSE sector is consistently gathered, shared and reflected within strategic discussions and wider system engagement.

Representation within the model operates across two connected pathways:

- Structured Representation through the Dispersed Leadership Model
- Distributed Sector Representation across wider meetings, boards and events

Together, these approaches ensure that representation is both manageable and inclusive, enabling broad participation while maintaining clear routes for influence.

Types of Representation

Representation within the model operates across two connected approaches:

Structured Representation

- Occurs through the Dispersed Leadership Model

- Focuses on shaping shared priorities
- Feeds into the Voluntary Sector Leadership Board

Distributed Sector Representation

- Occurs across wider meetings, boards and events
- Focuses on gathering insight and intelligence
- Feeds information back into the sector

This ensures representation is both manageable and inclusive.

Structured Representation

Structured representation is delivered through the Dispersed Leadership Model, providing a clear and consistent pathway from the VCFSE Collective into strategic discussion and governance spaces.

Within this approach:

- Insight is generated across the VCFSE Collective, including Thematic Circles, networks and forums
- Sector Leadership Groups gather, synthesise and translate this insight into shared sector priorities
- Representatives bring these priorities into the Voluntary Sector Leadership Board for strategic discussion and alignment
- Sector insight is also shared into the WBCF Board through Sector Leadership Group representation

This ensures that representation is:

- Grounded in lived experience and frontline delivery
- Shaped collectively across the sector
- Delivered in a structured and manageable way

By coordinating representation through Sector Leadership Groups, the model ensures that all groups within the VCFSE Collective have a clear route to influence, without requiring direct representation at Board level.

Distributed Sector Representation

Alongside structured representation, a broader and more open approach to sector representation will be established to strengthen engagement, visibility and communication across the borough.

Across Wigan, there are a wide range of meetings, boards, working groups and events where the VCFSE sector is represented. To ensure that this representation is not limited to a small number of individuals, opportunities will be shared more openly across the sector.

A coordinated and visible approach to sharing meetings, boards, working groups and events will support wider participation across the sector to:

- Provide visibility of upcoming opportunities
- Enable wider participation from across the sector
- Support a more distributed and inclusive approach to representation

Role of Representatives (Wider Engagement)

Individuals attending external meetings, boards or events through this approach are representing the sector, not solely their own organisation.

As such, they are expected to:

- Attend with a sector wide perspective
- Gather insight, information and relevant updates
- Identify key themes, opportunities or challenges
- Take clear and concise notes where appropriate

Feedback & Information Sharing

A consistent and structured approach to feedback is essential to ensure that information gathered through representation is shared across the sector.

Individuals attending meetings or events are expected to:

- Share key updates, insights and relevant information with WBCF
- Provide any notes, resources or actions arising from the discussion

WBCF, supported by the Collaborations Lead, will:

- Collate and synthesise this information
- Identify key themes and priorities
- Share relevant updates across the VCFSE Collective
- Ensure that insight is fed back into groups, networks, forums and thematic circles

This creates a consistent and transparent flow of information, ensuring that sector voice is not only represented, but understood and acted upon.

Principles of Representation

Representation within the model is underpinned by the following principles:

- **Inclusive:** opportunities are open and accessible across the sector
- **Structured:** clear pathways exist for insight to inform strategic discussions
- **Shared:** responsibility for representation is distributed across the sector
- **Accountable:** individuals are responsible for feeding information back
- **Connected:** insight flows consistently across all parts of the model

Governance and Integrity of Representation

To maintain trust, transparency and confidence in the model, representation is underpinned by clear expectations around integrity, accountability and collective responsibility.

Individuals representing the sector are expected to act in the best interests of the wider VCFSE sector, rather than promoting individual organisational priorities. This includes recognising where personal, organisational or partnership interests may influence perspective, and managing this appropriately.

Representatives are expected to:

- Act with honesty and integrity in all discussions and interactions
- Represent collective views and agreed priorities, rather than individual positions
- Declare any conflicts of interest where relevant, particularly in relation to funding, partnerships or decision making
- Avoid using representation roles to gain unfair advantage for their own organisation
- Share information openly and in a timely way, ensuring that insight is not held or restricted

Where appropriate, simple mechanisms such as expressions of interest, role outlines and agreed expectations will support consistency in how representatives are selected and supported.

WBCF will provide light-touch oversight and support to ensure that representation remains fair, transparent and aligned to the principles of the model, while maintaining a system-enabled, community-led approach.

This approach recognises the realities of the sector, including the balance between collaboration and competition, and seeks to create a shared understanding of how representation can be carried out in a way that builds trust and supports collective benefit.

Developing Representation Over Time

The Representation Framework will continue to evolve in response to sector needs, emerging opportunities and learning from implementation.

Where appropriate, representation opportunities may be:

- Rotated to support wider participation
- Targeted to ensure relevant expertise is present
- Adapted to reflect emerging priorities and areas of focus

This ensures that the approach to representation remains flexible, responsive and reflective of the sector.

Operating Approach

The Dispersed Leadership Model is designed to be flexible, responsive and collaborative, supported by a clear and consistent structure for engagement and representation.

At its core, the model reflects a system enabled, community led approach. WBCF provides coordination, structure and support, while the sector drives priorities, insight and leadership.

Insight is drawn from across the VCFSE Collective, including networks, forums and thematic circles, ensuring that lived experience and community need inform sector priorities. Sector Leadership Groups bring this together, identifying shared themes and translating these into collective priorities, which are then explored through strategic discussion at the Voluntary Sector Leadership Board.

A clear two-way flow of communication underpins the model, with outcomes, updates and key messages shared back across the VCFSE Collective.

Alongside this, wider representation across meetings, boards and events is supported through a coordinated and visible approach, enabling individuals to contribute to the collective understanding of the sector and ensuring that information, learning and opportunities are captured and shared.

WBCF provides oversight to ensure that information is collated and shared consistently across the sector, supporting transparency and connection between different parts of the model.

This approach ensures that leadership is distributed across the system, enabling a more responsive, inclusive and effective model of sector leadership.

Principles of the Model

The Dispersed Leadership Model is underpinned by a set of core principles, reflecting a system-enabled, community-led approach:

- **Sector-Led:** Leadership and priorities are driven by those working directly within communities
- **Community-Led:** Lived experience and local knowledge shape decision making
- **System-Enabled:** WBCF provides the structure, coordination and support required
- **Collaborative:** Organisations work together to identify shared challenges and solutions
- **Representative:** A diverse range of voices and experiences are included

- **Transparent:** Clear communication and open processes are maintained
- **Responsive:** The model adapts to emerging needs and changing contexts

These principles ensure that the model remains grounded, inclusive and impactful.

Success of the Model

The success of the Dispersed Leadership Model will be reflected in tangible improvements across the sector, not simply increased activity or engagement.

Success will be seen through:

- **Clear and agreed sector priorities**, shaped by lived experience and consistently reflected in strategic discussions
- **Stronger, more confident collaboration across organisations**, where relationships are built over time and partnerships are formed where they add genuine value
- **Improved access to funding, opportunities and decision making**, with greater transparency and understanding of how the system operates
- **Increased and more consistent sector influence**, reducing reliance on a small number of individuals and strengthening collective representation
- **Open and reliable communication across the sector**, where information is shared in a timely and accessible way, rather than held within informal networks

Ultimately, success is not defined by the number of meetings held or groups established, but by the extent to which the model leads to more coordinated, informed and effective action across the sector, resulting in better outcomes for communities.