



VCS Assembly – Building Relationships with Corporates

Wednesday 25 March 2026

Event Summary

Assembly Summary (key points)

- The Assembly focused on how the VCS can work more effectively with corporates and how councils can strengthen social value delivery through procurement.
- Key themes were: aligning asks to social value priorities, reducing burden on VCS organisations, improving coordination and accountability, and designing partnership opportunities that range from quick wins to longer-term commitments.

Workshop 1 Summary: Engaging with corporates in Westminster

- Examples of corporate social value activity (Wates) included circular-economy reuse of furniture/materials, volunteering to improve green space, donations/volunteering supporting health and wellbeing, digital inclusion support, and employability pathways (e.g., Construction Youth Trust/traineeships).
- Common challenges: corporates favouring short-term visible outcomes; unclear internal ownership; volunteer no-shows; charities left out of pocket where costs are not agreed; time/capacity to manage partnerships is often underestimated.
- A strong “project ask” should be concise (around two-thirds A4), include a clear strapline, describe beneficiaries/activities/impact, use social value language, and be explicit about what is needed (funding, skills, volunteering, donations, space, refurbishment), offering both small wins and bigger opportunities.

Workshop 2: Social value within council procurement

- While RBKC shows a strong commitment to social value, delivery through procured contracts is currently fragmented across departments and could improve with better coordination between corporates, procurement processes, and local VCSE organisations.
- Risks include missed opportunities, inequitable access (especially for smaller organisations), and weak accountability for supplier commitments made at tender stage.
- Priorities identified: centralise oversight, embed early community engagement in procurement, introduce an affordable and inclusive matching/brokerage mechanism, and strengthen governance, reporting and post contract award monitoring.

Workshop 3: Building relationships and shaping opportunities between corporates and the VCS

- Effective corporate engagement is built through long-term, trust-based relationships that align corporate strengths with community needs.
- Types of “wins” included patron schemes, skills-based volunteering, mentoring, volunteering days, seasonal fundraising and community health outreach.
- Case study (Costain & Kensington and Chelsea Foundation): a partnership that grew from volunteering into a strategic refurbishment supported by skills, labour and donated materials.

- Challenges noted for smaller organisations: lower visibility, less confidence in making asks, and uncertainty about what corporates can offer.
- Develop simple “menus” of partnership opportunities (small wins and longer-term projects) aligned to local social value priorities.

Workshops in detail

Engaging with corporates in Westminster Workshop

Delivered by Paola Pagliarin; Corporate Partnerships Manager; One Westminster

Social value case studies (Wates)

- Reuse of construction furniture and materials through circular economy approaches, reducing landfill and supporting community organisations.
- Staff volunteering (circa 100 hours) to improve green spaces at Marylebone Parish Church via specialist suppliers.
- Volunteering and donations (food, equipment, freezer) supporting Community Champions and health and wellbeing initiatives.
- Digital inclusion support – corporate volunteers helping residents use devices and digital services.
- Pathway into construction employment via Construction Youth Trust and Wates traineeship programme.

Westminster Council Key social value priorities

- Fair Communities – reducing inequality, supporting local groups, improving wellbeing.
- Fair Environment – waste reduction, reuse, greening spaces.
- Fair Economy – skills development, training and employment pathways.

Common challenges

- Businesses often seek short-term, high-visibility outcomes rather than long-term commitments.
- Unclear project ownership within organisations can stall corporate relationships.
- Risk of volunteer no-shows – organisations should not rely solely on corporate volunteers.
- Danger of being left out of pocket if costs and resources are not clearly agreed.
- Time and staff capacity required to manage corporate relationships is often underestimated.

Preparing a strong project ask

- Limit proposals to two-thirds of an A4 – concise and easy to read.
- Include a clear strapline setting out mission and values.
- Describe the project, beneficiaries, activities and intended impact.
- Use social value language (e.g., inclusion, wellbeing, employability, environment).
- Be explicit about asks: funding amounts, volunteering, donations, skills, space or refurbishment.
- Break asks into ‘small wins’ and larger opportunities to suit different businesses.

Social Value within council procurement workshop

Delivered by Angela Spence, KCSC

The discussion highlighted that while there is strong commitment to social value across the council, delivery is currently fragmented, with inconsistent approaches across departments and limited coordination between corporates, procurement processes, and local VCSE organisations. This fragmentation risks missed opportunities, inequitable access for smaller organisations, and weak accountability for promised outcomes from suppliers. There is a clear opportunity to strengthen impact by centralising oversight, embedding early community engagement within procurement, and introducing a practical matching or brokerage mechanism that is affordable and inclusive. Stronger governance arrangements, including clearer accountability mechanisms for contractors, were also identified as essential.

Key Issues Identified

- Lack of Centralised Social Value Coordination - Social value activity is distributed across multiple council teams, resulting in inconsistency, duplication, and limited clarity for external partners.
- Unclear Pathways Between Corporates and Local Organisations - Private companies often engage independently, while the existing menu of organisations is incomplete and can risk excluding smaller VCSE groups.
- Inconsistent Good Practice - Some departments demonstrate effective social value delivery through clearly specified contract requirements but could improve across the council.
- Cost and Accessibility of Social Value Platforms - Existing platforms can pose cost and access barriers, particularly for smaller organisations.
- Better accountability for Social Value Commitments - Commitments made at tender stage are not always informed by community engagement or robustly monitored post-award.

Strategic Recommendations

1. Establish Central Social Value Oversight by creating a single coordinating function to ensure consistency, clarity and impact.
2. Introduce a Local Matching / Brokerage Mechanism by developing a low-cost, inclusive matching service connecting council priorities, corporates and VCSE organisations.
3. Embed Early Community Engagement into Procurement by requiring bidders to demonstrate engagement with local organisations prior to tender submission.
4. Review and update policy and ensure equity and inclusion is a central aspect within the policy.
5. Strengthen Accountability and Governance
Introduce clearer governance, reporting and accountability mechanisms to hold corporates to account for delivery.

Building relationships and shaping opportunities between corporates and the VCS Workshop

Delivered by Catherine Watling; Corporate Partnerships Manager; K&C Foundation

Key Points

- Building relationships: Long-term, trust-based relationships enable corporates to provide targeted, high-impact support aligned to their strengths.
- Types of corporate wins: Examples included corporate patron schemes, skills-based volunteering, mentoring, volunteering days, seasonal fundraising campaigns, and community health outreach.
- Impact over transaction: Effective partnerships reduced financial and logistical burden on charities, prioritised beneficiary needs, and avoided disruption to services.
- Case study – Costain & Kensington and Chelsea Foundation: The partnership evolved from small-scale volunteering into a strategic refurbishment project, delivering significant value through skills, labour, and donated materials.
- Challenges identified: Smaller organisations often face lower visibility, limited confidence in making corporate asks, and uncertainty about what corporates can realistically offer.

Key Actions – Charities and Community Organisations

- Clearly define and prioritise support needed (skills, time, materials, access).
- Develop simple, well-scoped partnership ideas that are easy to communicate.
- Use existing relationships and local networks to initiate conversations.
- Start with pilot activities to build trust and grow partnerships over time.

Key Actions – Corporates

- Match organisational strengths and resources to charity needs.
- Reduce delivery and coordination burdens for charities.
- Offer flexibility in timing and delivery.
- Proactively engage with smaller grassroots organisations.