



**Shropshire Voluntary
and Community Sector
Assembly**

Annual Report 2019/20

Unprecedented, unsettling, uncertain, unfair, unmitigating, unsatisfactory, uncompromising, uncontrollable, uncomprehensible, unforgiving, unbelievable, unsatisfactory. The list goes on.

You don't need me to tell you that 2020 has been a year like no other – one that has (and will still for some time) test our resolve individually and collectively. I could sit here (in my kitchen – working from home like so many of us all in our new normal now) and write about all the challenges and issues but I'm not going to – I'm sure I don't need to tell you about them. I am going to mention the unfairness of the situation though – the pandemic has resulted in such a disproportionate spread of misery and suffering that it is sometimes might make us question our core beliefs and values. The gaps have definitely widened in our society and I know that this is felt right throughout the voluntary and community sector. So there's a massive job to do.



Thankfully though we have human kindness and I am going to dwell a little on this. Kindness, whilst it isn't exclusive to the voluntary and community sector, is our life blood and I think it has also been a life raft to so many over the last year. The kindness that I have experienced in our communities – to look after each other – to go the extra mile – to start new community ventures and enterprises – to be thoughtful for others. I think it's been remarkable, my experience is it has been noted in seats of power and that's what I want to remember about our last year. It's potentially been a window to the future – I know there are massive challenges ahead but I am hopeful that there are massive opportunities for a more empowered voluntary and community sector too.

I'm going to finish, as it's the end of my term as Chair, by saying a massive thank you to all the Voluntary and Community Sector Assembly Board – it always amazes me the passion and expertise that we have here and to Shropshire Council too – the support that Sarah Dodds and Sarah Nelsey provide is exemplary. But most of all a thank you to all the voluntary and community groups and people who run them – it's always a great pleasure to hear about the activities and impact and when I get chance to meet the people who make it happen. Keep going folks - your kindness is amazing and we really need you now and in future.

About the VCS Assembly



Shropshire VCS Assembly works for the benefit of voluntary, community and social enterprise groups and organisations working in Shropshire. The Assembly was established in 2007 and is based on the belief that collective representation is more influential than a series of individual voices; and that cooperation generates shared strength through a pooling of energy, ideas and resources. The Assembly provides a means for voluntary and community organisations throughout Shropshire to meet and exchange information, ideas and good practice. Shropshire VCS Assembly is a partnership body focusing on engagement and joint working across sectors. Shropshire Council hosts the VCSA and supports it in working to engage other public sector partners. Key functions of the VCSA include:

- Communication and information provision
- Networking and mutual support
- Representation and awareness
- Influence and policy development
- Cross sector working

The VCS Assembly is free to join, all you need to do is complete a simple membership form. To download a membership form, find out more about the VCS Assembly and access our key publications please visit: www.vcsvoice.org

You can also email us at vcsassembly@shropshire.gov.uk
Telephone: 01743 250094 or 01743 258519

316



**Voluntary
and Community
Sector Subscribers**

364

Newsletter Recipients

1051

**Twitter Followers
@ VCSVoice**

16



**New groups and
organisations**

92



**Newsletters
during 2018/19**

920

**News posts issued
during the year**

32

**“Covid-19” Special
Bulletins published**

14



**Events and
big meetings
organised**

Over the last 18 months the VCS Assembly Board has worked in partnership with a wide range of local groups and organisations to explore the following issues. Members of the Board have worked to build new relationships, networks and explore how the voluntary and community sector can support and assist in key areas of service delivery.

STP

The overriding aim of the Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin Sustainability and Transformation Plan (STP) is to ensure that local people are able to live as healthy lives as possible. The STP itself has inevitably focussed on the services that the NHS, Local Authorities and VCS organisations are able to contribute to this aim. The VCSA has worked closely with the STP over the last 18 months focussing on the resources that are available through non-statutory organisations which encourage people to take responsibility for their own health, or which support can people who have developed a health or other need. The VCSA members have been invited to sit on STP high level boards and steering groups, and on more focused delivery groups. In turn, STP leads have been invited to the VCS Assembly Board meetings to update on key developments.

Significant progress has been made in Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin on the development of the neighbourhood as a key construct in the delivery of local, community-based services. These aim to integrate general practice, community nursing, social care and community mental health services at a locality level – and have links with local voluntary groups and social capital (also referred to as pre-primary care).

Social Prescribing

Many VCS Assembly members have been involved in social prescribing across Shropshire and work to represent the sector at the VCSA Board and at a range of other partnership meetings has been led by Laurel Roberts, from The Qube, Oswestry. Social prescribing has continued to roll out in new areas across Shropshire with support from Shropshire Council's Public Health department facilitating new partnerships with GPs and Primary Care Networks. The model has been successful at reducing pressure on primary care and enabling people to become more informed of, and benefit from, the activities and support available within their local community.

The Qube has also supported the development of Community Connectors. Community Connectors has brought the sector together in areas where Social Prescribing has been developed. It has been instrumental in communicating what social prescribing is and how organisations can get involved, resulting in organisations participating and providing high quality interventions for individuals to be referred to.

Food Poverty

Over the last year the VCS Assembly Board has been keen to support the valuable work being delivered by Shrewsbury Food Hub and Shropshire Food Poverty Alliance. Throughout 2020 the Shropshire Food Poverty Alliance has continued to:

- Bring agencies together to provide a co-ordinated approach to food poverty
- Embed food poverty in council and NHS policy
- Build awareness of food poverty amongst policy makers, front line staff and the general public
- Enhance emergency support for people in food crisis (including monthly foodbank meetings)
- Improve signposting (especially via the Shropshire Larder website)
- Delivered projects (research into Children's access to food, Increasing the uptake of Healthy Start).

Additional roles have also been developed and established due to Covid-19 including:

- Promoting awareness of food poverty; specifically campaigns for donations during the crisis response.
 - Sharing information to support people in food poverty – specifically provision of up to date information on the Shropshire Larder website for both the public, and organisations who work with people who may be in food crisis.
 - Identifying need, and assisting with the coordination of food distribution during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Coordinating grant funding for Food Banks during the COVID-19 pandemic, to help maintain individual Food Bank supplies.

Safeguarding

The VCS Assembly is represented on the Keeping Adults Safe in Shropshire Board (KASiSB) as a statutory requirement. The KASiSB brings all partners together, represented by the VCSA, Shropshire Partners in Care, and statutory bodies. Julie Mellor from Taking Part represents the VCS Assembly and feeds back through the VCS Health and Care Forum and via the VCSA Board. There are a number of sub groups including learning and development, training competency framework; audit and performance and community engagement. There are key resources and information available on the website here:

<http://www.keepingadultssafeinshropshire.org.uk/>

Scrutiny

Many members of the VCS Assembly Board are involved in representing the wider sector through Scrutiny Committees and Scrutiny Task and Finish Groups. VCSA members are also contacted and invited to attend when they have an interest in a topic or can provide expert input and evidence for consideration. For more information see: <http://shropshire.gov.uk/committee-services/mglistcommittees.aspx?bcr=1>

Community Reassurance Team

Over the last year the VCSA Board has been working closely with representatives from Shropshire Council's Community Reassurance Team. The Community Reassurance Team was developed in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Shropshire Council established temporary, area-based Community Reassurance Teams (CRT) to support and enable responses to Covid-19 during the crisis, their aim is to provide support to new and existing community groups, communicating key information and resources and acting as a point of contact for town and parish councils and other organisations.

The CRT also work to ensure that Shropshire Council has information about what is happening in each local community, so it can best provide important advice to residents on a range of issues and concerns (such as food provision and access, energy and fuel purchasing, signposting to employment and debt advice, emergency grants and assistance etc.). Work is led by these teams to ensure that the information and guidance needed gets to the right people.

The role of the CRT is to understand the new solutions from within the community, identify them as being appropriate to solving a particular challenge and support the solution to be put in place. Any gaps in provision are also assessed and the CRT are designed to provide emergency backup when needed. The Teams work with communities to complement and enhance the amazing work already happening to ensure that everyone gets the help and support that they need to stay at home and stay well and healthy. The Community Reassurance Teams are a local point of contact for groups, local Councils and Shropshire Council Members, and disseminate information concerning the local delivery of programmes designed by central government. The delivery of a small grants programme for local groups has also been an important part of this work. Shropshire VCS Assembly has disseminated this information alongside news of other available grants programmes.

Loneliness

Shropshire VCS Assembly Board Members have listened to feedback from the wider membership and responded by highlighting loneliness as a key priority. Loneliness was featured in the Board's plan for 2019/20. Many VCS Assembly members play a vital role in preventing loneliness and with that in mind Shropshire VCSA held a Loneliness event on 4th December 2019. The event featured guest speakers from Papyrus, Energize, Shropshire Rural Support and SALC. Attendees were given the opportunity to work in groups and each group fed back one or two key points from the table discussions. A more detailed report on the Loneliness workshop is included later in the report.

Shropshire Association of Local Councils (SALC) has also been leading work focused on addressing loneliness and the VCSA and SALC continue to work closely together on this issue. The Covid-19 pandemic response highlighted the work taking place in local communities and some essential local partnerships between town and parish councils and voluntary and community groups and organisations.

Shropshire Infrastructure Partnersip

The Shropshire Infrastructure Partnership (SIP), which comprises of Qube, Energize, Shropshire RCC and Shropshire Youth Association, has been delivering infrastructure support to the voluntary sector in Shropshire for more than 15 years. Although not formally constituted as a partnership, SIP's shared purpose is to build the capacity of local community organisations to meet the needs of those who are the most disadvantaged in the County. SIP's core objective is to promote a well-informed, vibrant and sustainable voluntary and community sector, equipped to address local needs whilst also able to benefit from funding, campaigns and initiatives at both local and national level.

SIP aims to:

- Improve the lives of people living and working in Shropshire.
- Support and encourage community-led action and strong local governance.
- Strengthen the long-term sustainability of local community life.

Collectively the partners have expertise in all aspects of infrastructure as well as an established knowledge of and connections into the sector across Shropshire.

It is estimated that as many as 120 community groups have been established across Shropshire in response to the Covid-19. Most of these groups are informal and volunteer led and without them many vulnerable people in the community would not have had support. However these groups have been set up quickly, mostly via social media and without many of the considerations usually involved in establishing a new community group. Some of these groups will cease operating when life returns to normal but some groups want to continue to support their community and are turning their thoughts to their sustainability and future post Covid-19.

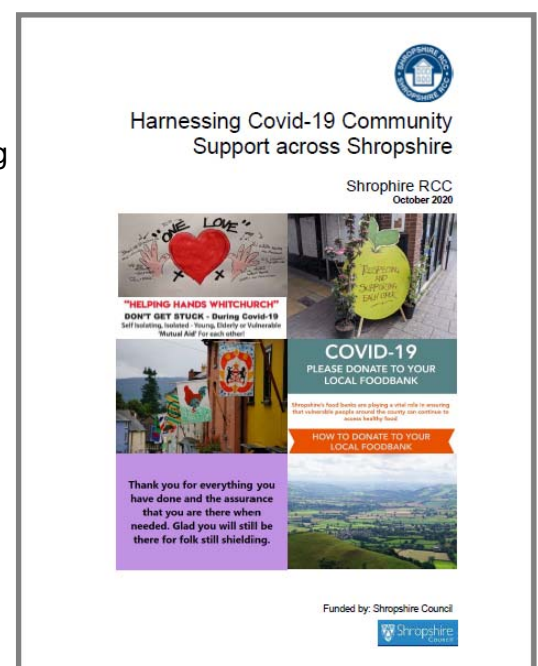
SIP worked closely with the Community Fund to draw up a funding proposal to provide mentoring support to new community groups seeking to become more established. The bid was successful. Supported and managed by the SIP, the mentoring and training programme will build a local network of expertise which will provide a flexible approach to infrastructure support in keeping with the way these groups have formed and are currently being run. This flexible approach will provide accessible good practice advice and guidance to groups. This advice and guidance will be targeted to each group's particular needs and delivered at the time they need it.

The advice offered by this project will include amongst many other things:

- Governance, legal structures and developing and working with Boards.
- Good practice policies and procedures – safeguarding, data protection.
- Financial procedures – transparency, cash flow and budgeting.
- Funding – funding sources and how to apply for it.
- Sustainability and Impact of the group.
- Volunteers – safeguarding, management and co-ordination.

Although the project is now established there may still be opportunities to participate. If you are interested in either becoming a mentor or benefitting from the work please contact Shropshire Rural Communities Charity: <https://www.shropshire-rcc.org.uk/>

You can find out more about how communities across Shropshire responded to the pandemic and the support needs of local communities in the 'Harnessing Covid-19 Community Support across Shropshire' report produced by Shropshire Rural Communities Charity.



Funding Workshop

On 26th June 2019, Shropshire VCSA, in conjunction with SALC held a joint workshop chaired by Julia Baron, to look at funding opportunities available to the sector and discuss top tips for success. The workshop was designed to support local town and parish council and voluntary and community sector organisations and equip them with the information needed to increase chances of gaining funding.

Mike Deegan – As an experienced councillor, Mike understands how parish councils operate and the financial challenges they face and has been instrumental in the delivery of key projects.

Dave Tristram – Dave has worked with the community and voluntary sector in Herefordshire for over 15 years to develop projects and access external funding, with a focus on additionality, sustainability and gaps in existing delivery.

Julia Baron – Julia is an experienced Chief Officer with a demonstrable track record of working in the voluntary and charitable “third” sector. She has been the CEO of Shropshire Rural Communities Charity for 19 years and is our expert on smaller amounts of local funding. Shropshire RCC manages the Shropshire Community Fund.

Lynne Carney – Lynne is the Funding Officer for Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin from the National Lottery Community Fund. Lynne is the expert on the “Awards for All” and “Reaching Communities” funding that is available to the voluntary and community sector.

Julia explained that there are 160,000 charities and 10,000 grant making trusts. They work in different geographical areas, on different types of work and cover different themes and beneficiaries. Some activities can be very specific. Grant making trusts can vary in how much they fund but often it can be quite small amounts less than £100k. Often they have been set up as a legacy, someone has left money in their will and this is invested, and the interest/income used to support a particular cause. Charitable Trusts are working to help others and improve lives. Trustees are appointed to manage the legacy, and they understand their aims and how they want the available funds to make a difference. Grant making charitable trusts don't deliver activities themselves, they make donations to other organisations to activities.

Top tips from Julia included:

- Read the charity overview to find out a bit more about them.
- Look at the accounts to get an idea of how much money is available to donate, the type of value they are likely to donate, and whether they are under or over-subscribed.

Mike spoke about the challenges small groups have compared to larger organisations. Largest organisations can often afford consultants or employ fundraising experts. In small groups and organisations, volunteers must do everything themselves and be the catalyst to making something happen. Mike highlighted the importance of asking people with the skills in a community to help. People will often be happy to use their skills to assist

Funding has reduced by 20% since 2008 and low interest rates and the economic situation mean funders relying on interest or stocks and shares have less to give. Dave Tristram explained that the Lottery has less to give, landfill grants have reduced, and it is much harder to fund capital projects. Previously, Dave had previously helped attract money for the second passive building in the country but that type of funding is now very hard to find. Lynne said that they were split equally between the Awards For All and Reaching Communities. She said that this is important for Parish Councils to know about this and to pass on the knowledge.

Delegates heard that there are some trusts unable to give their money away and there are some funders with area allocations, trying to ensure resources are used across the country. Even RCC's small grants scheme is not over subscribed. Quality applications haven't increased in number even if numbers of applications have increased overall. It is important to do a good job and develop relationships with funders. The workshop really emphasised how fortunate we are in Shropshire to have many strong, sustainable community organisations working for the benefit of people in the county.

Loneliness Workshop

On 4th December 2019, Shropshire VCSA held a joint workshop chaired by Chris Child, around the topic of Loneliness. There were a range of speakers and the chance for the VCSA to discuss the topic amongst themselves. Loneliness is a human condition and we all experience it at some time. Friends and family may rally round and help, but others may not have that support and may not be able to break out of the cycle or may use unhealthy strategies.

Facts and figures highlight that loneliness is a significant health issue:

- A study by The Co-op and the British Red Cross reveals over 9 million people in the UK across all adult ages – more than the population of London – are either always or often lonely.
- Loneliness, living alone and poor social connections are as bad for your health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day. (Holt-Lunstad, 2010)
- Loneliness is worse for you than obesity. (Holt-Lunstad, 2010)
- Lonely people are more likely to suffer from dementia, heart disease and depression. (Valtorta et al, 2016) (James et al, 2011) (Cacioppo et al, 2006)
- Loneliness is likely to increase your risk of death by 29% (Holt-Lunstad, 2015)

Loneliness seems to be something that is being highlighted more and more across the sector and sub sectors including community transport, mental health services, care services, physical activity. Organisations are meeting people who seem to be increasingly suffering from loneliness and wellbeing concerns.

The event included guest speakers. First was Harriet Foster from Papyrus, an organisation that works as a suicide prevention charity. Papyrus has been in operation for twenty years and was initially formed by a group of parents in the north east of the country. The children who these parents lost ranged from the ages of 8 to 34 years of age. The upper age limit of the young people that Papyrus support is 35. The founders worked on the belief that if young people's access to services like Papyrus had been available, then perhaps their deaths could have been prevented. They work to prevent other parents experiencing the same loss.

Papyrus offers suicide support in a variety of ways:

- Telephone helpline.
- Equipping the community to talk about suicide in a safe environment.
- Training.
- Breaking through the stigma.
- Influencing policy and change.

Nick Herbert was the events second main speaker. Nick works as the 'More Than Sport' Officer with Energize. The project is funded by the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner's Office. Nick explained that the young people he works with may be already in the criminal justice system or at risk of becoming so. Engagement is voluntary and referrals come from pupil referral units and projects such as Strengthening Families across Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin. Nick explained that he initially meets the young person at the referring agency and talks to them about what they can do together to remove barriers. Nick said that he is not a mentor but gives the young people positive reinforcement, speaks to their coaches and reminds them to attend. Nick expressed concerns around social media, rural isolation, lack of transport, lack of opportunities, cultural isolation and that backgrounds and gender identities can be completely different for all young people. There are many care homes in very rural areas in Shropshire and this can result in the young people becoming lonely and isolated, and lacking access to the facilities children in more urban communities may benefit from. The project is about building good foundations which will have a lasting impact and showing young people appropriate role models. Praise, positive reinforcement, collaboration and working together all go a long way.

Andrew Bebb from Shropshire Rural Support spoke next about how lonely it can be working in farming and how people can really struggle financially. Shropshire Rural Support helps anyone who needs it, it doesn't discriminate or exclude the non-farming community. The issues people struggle with range widely but commonly include depression and financial pressures.

Councillor Ray Wickson, Shropshire Association of Local Councils was the final speaker who informed attendees about 'Reaching Out'. The report was produced by the National Association of Local Councils and focuses on the issue of loneliness. It is a very helpful resource summarising key issues, and drawing together useful sources of information and signposting.

Climate Change Workshop

On 11th March 2020, Shropshire VCSA held workshop chaired by Tony Green from Shropshire Green Xchange, around the very current topic of climate change.

Tony opened the workshop by explaining that climate change can seem an overwhelming or distant issue with little influence on your daily work. However, as we all share the same planet and natural resources, all people and organisations have the potential to be negatively affected by a changing climate and understanding this can help us prepare and plan more effectively. It is important to understand climate change in order to consider the possible impacts upon your work, how to help mitigate extreme scenarios through actions taken now, and what methods are available to increase the climate resilience of your organisation. Over 60% of local authorities and many other charities and organisations have declared climate emergencies. This is a really important statement of intent.

The aim of the workshop was for attendees to:

- Have dedicated time away from busy working / volunteering roles to consider climate change and the impact on organisations and communities.
- Through discussion group sessions, hear about the challenges being faced in Shropshire and the work already taking place to address climate change and move towards becoming carbon neutral.
- Learn about the inspirational work of other local organisations.
- Network with other local groups and organisations working to address climate change in Shropshire.
- Gain knowledge to move forwards.

Speakers included

- Adrian Cooper – Shropshire Council
- Simon Ross – Marches Energy Agency
- Roy Alexander - Ashton Hayes – Going Carbon Neutral
- George Vigileos - Stop Ecocide: Change The Law

Adrian Cooper spoke around Shropshire Council's Strategy Framework for Climate Change, which includes:

- Focus for action
- Reduction of Carbon and other Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions;
- Capture and storage of GHG emissions;
- Improve corporate and community resilience and adaptation to the Climate Crisis.

Simon Ross explained to attendees the connection between fuel poverty, poverty and climate change and suggested some project ideas including:

- Carbon literacy training –help you understand what you need to do
- Shaping Places for Healthier Lives
- Wider determinants of health
- National Lottery Climate Action Fund
- Can we explore and develop something?

Roy Alexander spoke to attendees about the project that he had led for Ashton ayes to become the country's first carbon neutral village. In 2006 Roy and other local residents decided to stop talking about climate change and do something about it by reducing our emissions as part of the solution .Their aim was to become the first community in England to achieve carbon-neutral status. The village wanted their children and future generations to know that they tried to do their bit and encourage other communities to follow suit. Roy spoke about the impact of the work and the difference that had been made through collective action.

George Vigileos spoke about ecocide. He explained that ecocide is serious loss, damage or destruction of ecosystems, and includes climate and cultural damage. Stop Ecocide: Change The Law believe ecocide should be recognised as an atrocity crime at the International Criminal Court (the ICC) - alongside Genocide, War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity. George explained in further depth the campaigns and projects that the charity are involved with.

The event attendees considered the impacts of climate change on their own organisations, and on client groups, and focused on the steps we can all take to contribute to change.

Over the last 12 months Shropshire VCS Assembly has supported a wide range of local consultations, Covid-19 related sub groups and engagement opportunities, providing the voice of the voluntary and community sector but also working to promote opportunities to influence widely through the weekly VCSA newsletter and at sector meetings.

As part of the VCS Assembly's work to influence change, three new Sub Groups have been established and all are chaired by VCSA Board members.

Commissioning Sub Group

The Commissioning Sub Group reports its work and progress to the Social Impact Task Force but also links to the VCS Assembly Board and Change and Compact Group. Membership of the group includes:

- Representatives from Shropshire Council (including commissioners)
- Representatives of Shropshire VCS Assembly Board
- VCS lead for the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership
- NHS leads
- Shropshire Partners in Care
- Shropshire's Association for Local Councils
- DWP
- A member of Shropshire Council's Feedback and Insight Team (to provide administration support).

The principal role of the group is to review current commissioning approaches in the context of significant change and determine proposals and opportunities for development. The group has been:

- Reflecting on feedback concerning commissioning practice, considering what is working well and where there are challenges, barriers and areas for improvement.
- Reviewing commissioning practice and resource allocations and reflecting on how well these fit with current strategies and commissioning resources.
- Determining where there are new opportunities and areas in need of development (for example further developing social value practice and climate change considerations).
- Undertaking some horizon scanning to ensure proposals are designed in the context of change and known direction of travel.
- Acknowledging the context the group is working in, the need for proposals to be developed quickly, whilst ensuring they are robust.
- Determining where the group can deliver change and where it can influence others.

Work undertaken to date includes:

- An overview of all VCS commissioning concerns gathered through the Compact issues process and through discussions at the Change and Compact Group and VCS Assembly Board meetings.
- A review of public sector investments for Shropshire using the Porge spend analysis tool.
- Research into small value contracts templates and terms and conditions, using examples from other local authorities where proportional commissioning approaches have been applied.
- A review of the current commissioning strategy and its approach (this is ongoing work).
- The preparation of two surveys designed for commissioners to gather feedback on Shropshire Council's current commissioning strategy and approaches to social value. The research findings will be used to inform the work of the sub-group and the development of resources and guidance.
- The production of a report highlighting good practice in social value, current approaches to social value and options for the further development of Shropshire's approach.

The group will continue its work throughout the coming year. It is hoped that although an initial focus will be on Shropshire Council's work, that learning can be applied within a partnership approach and good practice and other resources shared widely with public sector commissioners.

Infrastructure & Support Sub Group

The Infrastructure and Support Sub Group reports its key findings and results to the Social Task Force and also provides updates through the VCS Assembly Board and Change and Compact Group. In the same way as the Commissioning Sub Group, the group is informal in nature, but it is acknowledged that connections are made to other areas of work and strategic level decision making. Membership of the group includes the following (it is recognised that some group members will have more than one of the roles below):

- Representatives from Shropshire Council (including commissioners)
- Representatives of Shropshire VCS Assembly Board and VCS organisations working in neighbouring local authority areas.
- Representatives of the Food Poverty Alliance.
- VCS lead for the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership
- Representatives of other Public Sector Partner organisations
- A member of Shropshire Council's Feedback and Insight Team (to provide administration support).

The group has set out to:

- Define the meaning and different elements of VCS infrastructure in a way that can be understood by those working outside of the voluntary and community sector.
- Agree the scope of the work that will be undertaken. Due to the breadth of infrastructure support, some elements will not be considered in detail. Priorities have been established.
- Define an action plan for the group.
- Complement the work for Shropshire Infrastructure Partnership, recognising the infrastructure services and support delivered by SIP. Work with SIP to add value to the work they have undertaken recently to better understand sector support needs.
- Work with SIP to set out existing provision and where current resources are preventing needs from being met.
- Explore opportunities to support infrastructure delivery in Shropshire. Considering the range of investment opportunities such as external funding streams, income generation and investment from local partner organisations etc.

The group has met four times to date and considered the following issues:

- The impact of Covid-19 on the sector.
- The need to harness and sustain the large scale community action and goodwill fostered by the pandemic.
- The different strands of resources which are available to support the sector and the need to bring these together more clearly
- The emerging evidence of the impact of Covid-19 on individuals and communities.

Significant progress has been made over recent months. The results of work to date include:

- Key issues have been raised with local leaders and elected representatives through the Council's Social Impact Task Force.
- An action plan and covering report has been produced to highlight the two main strands of the group's work: a) back office infrastructure needs of larger VCS organisations and b) the support needs of small groups.
- A proposal report has been developed by Shropshire Infrastructure Partnership. Based on local research, this sets out the infrastructure needs of small groups and the resources required to establish a model of support to meet those needs.

Hardship & Poverty Sub Group

The Hardship and Poverty Sub Group has been working to report its progress and findings to the Social Task Force. It has also made important connections with other local partnership groups and links, in the same way as the other sub groups, to the VCSA Board and Change and Compact Group. VCS Assembly Representatives feed back to the VCS Assembly Board at each meeting.

The group is informal in nature, but has been working to make clear recommendations and proposals to inform strategic level decision making.

Membership of the group include the following:

- Representatives of the VCSA Board
- Representatives of the Food Poverty Alliance
- Marches Energy Agency
- Other VCS Assembly Members (invited as appropriate to support the group's work)
- Representative from DWP
- Representatives from Shropshire Council
- A member of Shropshire Council's Feedback and Insight Team (to provide administration support).

The group has set out to:

- Present local issues and concerns, and the different elements of hardship and poverty in a way that can be understood by those working outside of the voluntary and community sector.
- Agree the scope of the work, highlighting priorities for action.
- Deliver an action plan for the group with agreed outcomes.
- Complement the work and research of Citizen's Advice Shropshire and the Food Poverty Alliance, recognising the work that other partners have undertaken.
- Define where current resource concerns are preventing needs from being met.
- Set out where there may be opportunities to work in new ways.
- Acknowledge the context the group is working in, the need for proposals to be developed quickly, whilst ensuring they are robust. The group has acknowledged the pressures generated by the pandemic; and seeks to understand where those pressures will grow and long term needs and demands will need to be met.
- Work has taken place to suggest proposals and present solutions.

The group proposes to:

- Set up a Money Advice Forum to include all provider of money advice in the county.
- Bring together all housing agencies to identify ways of working together.
- Work with the Economic task force and other agencies already supporting unemployed to establish cross working to support those facing redundancy or those unemployed and needing retraining or support in job search.
- Use existing forums such as Shropshire Food Poverty Alliance, Sustain, Advice Advocacy and Welfare benefits Partnership (VCSA) to build up a robust referral system for vulnerable people and look into the development of virtual hubs to ensure countywide access.
- Undertake debt advice research in Shropshire, learning from work recently carried out within Herefordshire. Findings will be shared to support cross boundary working and Marches partnerships.

The group's work will continue into the next year. The group is committed to regularly reviewing its progress to make the best use of available time and resources and respond to the changing social and economic trends and changes being seen within the county and beyond.

Community & Rural Strategy

Shropshire VCSA have played an integral part in the development of Shropshire Council's Draft Community and Rural Strategy. The idea of the strategy is to build on Shropshire's natural assets and strengths and ensure resources follow priorities.

In the summer of 2019, Shropshire Council started work with a range of partner organisations to develop an evidence base and identify shared priorities. Workshops were held with VCS Assembly members, town and parish councils, elected councillors, and Shropshire Business Board to consider the issues most important to our local communities. The data, information and feedback obtained from across the county was then used to inform the draft Community and Rural Strategy.

The Community and Rural Strategy is a high-level framework strategy. It highlights many of the priorities that will be built into other local strategies and delivery plans (for example Shropshire Council's developing Leisure Strategy and draft Cultural Strategy). Shropshire Council's Corporate Plan establishes the overarching principles and ambitions for Shropshire Council and the Rural and Community Strategy must sit alongside that and show what Shropshire Council can do with its influence and resources. It will show what support communities need to do what they do and take a joint approach to moving forward.

On 13th November 2019, an event was held for SALC and the VCSA to hear about the results from the VCSA and SALC survey and to feed into the strategy first hand. 106 survey responses were received (35% town and parish councils and 23% voluntary and community sector groups and organisations). The remainder were informal local groups and businesses. The themes within the survey were organisational resilience, influence, rural issues and concerns within communities, local challenges, the use of resources/support needs and the future. Overall more survey respondents felt their organisations were doing OK or thriving compared to those who felt their organisation was in crisis. Although the data highlighted that things were overall more challenging for the voluntary and community sector (more services being delivered). The feedback was very positive about local partnerships, networks and referrals, and people locally taking action and making a difference, the issues that stands out as a concern is that many survey respondents didn't feel like they could influence decisions (less than 40% feel they can influence decisions in Shropshire). Support needs highlighted through the survey include more support needed including use of local buildings, access to information, the need for funding, the importance of making better use of local knowledge and increasing communication and training. Other suggestions included more genuine collaboration/co-design, the importance of equality of service provision and valuing the work of volunteers.

Some main evidence base findings included:

- Higher levels of household growth compared to population growth, attributable to more household formation. Smaller average household size with high volumes of single person households.
- Annual net migration 2016-2018 much higher than projected. This suggests the 2018 based projections (to be published in March 2020) will result in higher levels of projected population / household growth and higher levels of housing need.
- Fuel poor households predominantly in the rural areas.
- Some areas of the county have no gas meters – parts of north east Shropshire and parts of south west Shropshire.
- Data supports the feedback that rural isolation and loneliness should be considered a priority.
- The dependency ratio – there are not enough working age people to support the increase in the combined 0-16 and 65+ age groups.

The Rural and Community Strategy has not yet been agreed (the consultation closed on 6 December 2020) but its draft shared priorities are:

- Keeping everyone happy and healthy, whatever their age
- Helping people who are lonely to connect with others and enjoy themselves
- Finding effective and sustainable ways to move people around
- Embracing the skills and experience of our older generation
- Making sure we have the right homes in the right places
- Attracting and keeping young people in the county and developing a skilled workforce
- Continuously improving physical and digital connectivity
- Reducing our impact on the climate, nature and the wider environment.

Change and Compact Group progress

The Change and Compact Group was established to enable joint working across sectors at the strategic level, sharing skills, knowledge and resources to co-design change proposals and new ways of working. The group takes a lead on cross sector engagement with an emphasis on co-design. Organisations invited to attend include:

- Representatives of Shropshire VCS Assembly
- Shropshire Association of Local Councils
- Shropshire Council
- Shropshire STP representative and/or CCG

The Change and Compact Group, with its regular meetings and project focus, has worked effectively to compliment the work of the VCSA Assembly Board, SALC Executive and other groups.

Over the last 12 months work areas have included:

- Overseeing engagement of voluntary and community sector groups and organisations and town and parish councils in the development of the Rural and Community Strategy for Shropshire.
- Facilitating VCS involvement in Shropshire Council's scrutiny programmes.
- Considering national policy changes and research including the learning from around the UK presented in the report by Collaborate named 'Building Collaborative Places'.
- Working to maintain engagement in Shropshire Council's commissioning of preventative and social care services.
- Updating the VCS Assembly's evidence base document highlighting key data and the value of the sector.
- Supporting the development of Shropshire Council's Volunteering Strategy and approaches.
- Following the development of Primary Care Networks and working to facilitate local engagement.
- Considering local and national policy changes including the NHS long term plan, STP plans and developments and Shropshire Council's Corporate Plan.
- Highlighting issues for inclusion in MP meetings and through the National Association of Local Council's lobbying work.

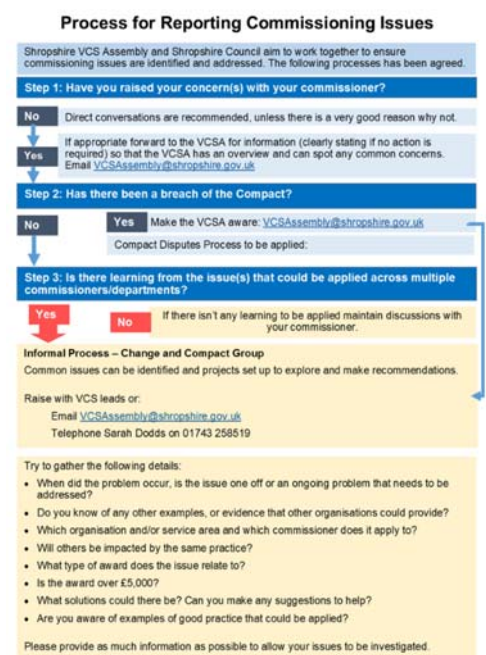
Planned work includes:

- Overseeing research and partnership work to address key priorities following the coronavirus pandemic.
- Delivering a research project led by SALC which will include a focus on community action, local needs and future priorities.

Compact Issue Reporting

Shropshire VCS Assembly have been maintaining, and regularly reporting, a process by which VCS Assembly members and other VCS contacts can report Compact concerns. The Shropshire Compact is an agreement that sets out the "rules of engagement" for how public sector commissioners and the voluntary and community sector (VCS) should work together for the benefit of the people we serve. It is not just a document with key principles but a way of working. There is a strong commitment within Shropshire Council to understand Compact concerns and work together to address them. The process for raising concerns is issued regularly through the VCSA newsletter (see image).

To raise any concerns please email: vcasassembly@shropshire.gov.uk
Please mark your email 'Compact'.



The Pan Disability Forum

The Pan Disability Forum held forum meetings over the first half of the year. Due to the challenges of Covid 19 it has not been possible to plan face to face meeting since September. The forum meetings offer a great opportunity for members to keep informed about the work of the sector in Shropshire and further afield. At the last main forum, a speaker reported on the progress made by Building Better Opportunities, supporting those furthest from employment back into work.

The forum has identified housing for people with disabilities as a priority and was interested to learn about the practical solutions to reduce fuel poverty offered by Marches Energy Agency. Members updates "What we do" included the latest projects and work at Headway Shropshire.

The Pan Disability Forum has a membership of over 30 organisations supporting people with disabilities across Shropshire and updates on current developments of interest have continued to be circulated to members throughout the year.

0-25 Summit

The last 12 months has seen members of the summit representing the sector in meetings with Shropshire Council, Shropshire CCG, SATH, Police and Crime Commissioner and Fire Authority. The groups the Summit is represented on include Shropshire Children's Trust, Early Help partnership board, SCSB safeguarding board, 0-25 SEND strategic board, Change and Compact group, Drug and Alcohol Prevention group.

Through these meetings, the group is able to reflect the views and thoughts of the sector and young people as well as inform others about current and emerging issues. The group has shrunk in membership over the last 2 years which reflects the diminishing funding and state of the sector. However, the Summit is optimistic that the "APPG on Youth Affairs" report, increases in CSE, county lines and knife crime will lead to a reinvestment in the preventative early intervention services that will reduce demand on more expensive acute services offered by statutory bodies.

Voluntary Sector Mental Health Forum

Only one face to face meeting has taken place in 2020 due to pandemic restrictions but communication between forum members has remained strong throughout. The essence of everything has been about communication. Endeavouring to keep organisations as well informed as possible by circulating up to date information from a variety of agencies.

During May voluntary sector and other services were in order to continue to provide something that was more appropriate for people reaching out to them during lockdown. A variety of services were quickly provided including provision in the more rural parts of Shropshire. New online provision was established.

The voluntary sector updates from May 2020 were circulated widely to MPFT staff Social Care staff and CCG's hoping they would spread the word. The Hive, Trident Reach, Age UK, SAMS, Designs in Mind, Victim Support (Update), Autonomy, Shropshire Mind, Autism Hub and A4U, Street Pastors, Cruse, Shrewsbury ARK are just a few that put service users at the heart of everything. Congratulations to all organisations who managed to operate in alternative ways to support service users and carers throughout this pandemic.

Criminal Justice Forum

It has been a challenging year for the Criminal Justice Forum as members have found it difficult to find the time to attend meetings. Although the Criminal Justice Forum has not physically met during the last year, it has continued to be active through email correspondence. Latest news, items of interest and key updates have been emailed to all VCS members on the Criminal Justice Forum mailing list. We are entering interesting times for Criminal Justice as the government reviews arrangements for Probation Services.

Anyone interested in joining the forum can email Angela Parton at: angela.parton@yss.org.uk

Shropshire Community Transport Consortium

Shropshire Community Transport Consortium represents groups throughout Shropshire providing transport across the County: local, not-for-profit provision of transport for people who might otherwise be isolated. It encompasses a broad range of services, from lift-giving by volunteer car drivers, to dial-a-ride minibus services for disabled and elderly people, to local bus services that would otherwise not exist because they cannot survive on a commercial basis. In Shropshire the consortium provides nearly 150,000 journeys every year, combatting loneliness and providing our flexible, friendly and compassionate door to door support.

Members have all experienced challenges with increased demand, particularly linked to the changes for non emergency hospital transport and reductions and closures of bus routes. Some groups have introduced new services to accommodate additional passengers but we sometimes struggle to meet the increasing demand within current resources. The consortium is actively working on proposals to address these issues with Shropshire Council, the CCG and Hospital Trust.

The final conclusion to the challenge against how the community transport sector is licenced is still awaited, however the Department for Transport have issued new guidance which enables continued operation for the foreseeable future. We would like to thank everyone, including Shropshire Council, who continue to support our services.

Voluntary Sector Health & Social Care Forum

The VSHSC Forum has met on 2 occasions in 2020. Prior to covid organisations met in March at the RCC for valuable networking as well as an opportunity to learn about and input into new developments. The meeting engaged with speakers from the CCG and Macmillan on the proposals to improve End of Life Care and as well as an NHS/Helpforce proposal to develop an Integrated Care System with voluntary sector as a key partner to be piloted in a rural and urban area. In October members met online to talk with representatives from the Clinical Commissioning Group about the development of Primary Care Networks. The forum learned about these new NHS structures their purpose and plans, and discussed how local communities and voluntary sector groups can be involved.

This has been a quiet year for the forum as the challenges of working through the Covid pandemic has left little capacity to organise meetings. Networking and support has continued for many of the organisations that attend the regular meetings through other mechanisms such as Shropshire Council's weekly Covid catch up. All members of the Forum have also received emails about activities and topics of interest as a way of keeping up to date and in touch.

Active Partnership

It has been another tremendously busy year for the Active Partnership and of course much of what has been progressed and achieved earlier in the year might well have been overshadowed and overwhelmed by the outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic and the associated lockdown that took place at the end of March. Whilst much of the physical activity and sport sector closed down with the onset of the pandemic and lockdown it's clear, however, that the active lifestyle agenda and the associated benefits that are derived from this are very much recognised. And in fact the relationships which exist across strategic partners and locally delivery organisations have enabled the partnership to play a key role in supporting community resilience at this time.

Throughout the year the Active Partnership has maintained a vibrant and can do approach to delivery of its 'Actively Improving Lives' Strategy. The focus on less active and more vulnerable / isolated community groups has resulted in significant learning and progress in terms of what is needed to better enable an active lifestyle for older people and those with long term, health conditions in particular. The work Stabilising Young Lives has received some national recognition and achieved extension as a key part of the new Police and Crime Commissioner prevention contract. It's not all been positive though as the Inclusively Fit project came to an end and some key members of the team have moved on.

Whilst the future is going to be very challenging for all – not least in terms of recovering from the Covid-19 outbreak and safely returning to play in the many sport and recreation facilities and environments across our county – I am confident that we have the vision and energy to continue to grow our influence and impact across Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin.

The Sounding Board

During this year the Shropshire Older Peoples Assembly stood down due to reducing numbers. However, Age UK Shropshire Telford & Wrekin have established a new Sounding Board, which includes many of the members of SOPA and other individuals and organisations with an interest in older people's issues. Age UK STW have sought to increase the diversity of the group by inviting several groups and organisations to get involved and have included carers organisations in this.

The Sounding Board met twice in 2019, the meetings were well attended and the main topic of discussion for both these sessions was Age UK STW's strategic outcomes and how these should be developed or changed for the future to continue to meet the needs of all older and old people across the county. The feedback was compiled into a You Said, We Did document and shared with participants.

Unfortunately, due to Covid 19 the Sounding Board was unable to hold its planned spring event but Age UK SRTW has continued to communicate with members electronically and to circulate VCSA and other relevant materials. It is unlikely we will be able to meet physically in this year and we are considering a virtual meeting later in the year to discuss the impact of Covid on older people and the implications for future services.

At the end of 2019 the older peoples Sounding Board spent some time examining and commenting on Age UK Shropshire Telford & Wrekin's strategic outcomes, this work is being fed into the update of Age UK's strategy, which will be refreshed in 2021. Since the start of Covid 19 much of the communication between the Sounding Board has been by email and the chair has circulated relevant Covid and non Covid information to the group. We did however, manage to have a successful online meeting in May when members had the opportunity to catch up and share information about what they had been doing during the pandemic and discuss the impact it has had on older people.

Members suggested they would like to have more frequent, single topic meetings and there is a meeting planned for the 26th November to discuss digital exclusion, which is an increasingly important issue for older people. Further meetings are being planned to consider the Age UK report on the impact of Covid on older people.

Green Shropshire Xchange

Green Shropshire Xchange is the environmental network for Shropshire and Telford groups. In March this year a workshop was organised with the VCSA on Climate change and the Third Sector. This successful event included presentations and discussions on the issues and possible actions required.

Local groups have been active on the issues of Pointless Plastics and Climate Change. During the lockdown the group has been supporting local community actions such as food banks.

Telford & Wrekin Chief Officers' Group

The Telford & Wrekin Chief Officers Group (COG) plays a leading role in providing a voice for the voluntary and community sector within Telford & Wrekin. COG has a seat on all T&W Partnership Boards and the Health & Safety Partnership Board. A strong partnership has been established between the COG and Shropshire VCS Assembly to ensure that joint working can take place across Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin.

Social prescribing is designed to support people with a wide range of social, emotional or practical needs. It is a way of enabling GPs, health and social care professionals, the voluntary sector and other partners such as Job Centres and pharmacies, to refer people to a social prescribing advisor. The scheme is evolving in Shropshire and is currently available in a growing number of GP practices and community centres. Work has been taking place to roll social prescribing out across the county. Current locations include: Albrighton Medical Practice, Bishops Castle Medical Practice, Bridgnorth Medical Practice, Churchmere Medical Group in Ellesmere, 3 GP practices in Oswestry and 4 in Shrewsbury.

Social prescribing is an example of partnership working across sectors, with voluntary and community sector support providing an approach focused on preventing people from becoming socially isolated or tackling concerns alone that may be prevented from escalating and leading to more permanent and damaging health conditions. Individuals are referred to a social prescriber who will work with them to discuss their health and wellbeing. Together they will come up with a plan of action that refers them to community activities that can make them feel happier and healthier.

The people who may benefit from social prescribing include:

- People caring for someone who can't manage without this help
- Anyone feeling lonely or socially isolated
- People who want to change their lifestyle e.g. giving up smoking or losing weight
- Those living with a long-term health condition

Social Prescribing started in Shropshire in 2017, and is part of the NHS Long Term Plan. The NHS has committed that at least 900,000 people will benefit from Social Prescribing by 2024. A significant number of VCS Assembly members are involved in social prescribing through Shropshire and the work is represented on the VCS Assembly Board by Laurel Roberts from Oswestry Community Action, Qube, one of the founding members of the social prescribing approach in Shropshire. Laurel works closely with contact from Shropshire Council's Public Health department and other partnership organisations and is a good point of contact for any VCS organisations hoping to find out more.

You can also find out more via the Shropshire Together website and contact details here:
<http://www.shropshiretogether.org.uk/contact-us/>

Integrated Care System Shadow Board

Integrated care systems (ICSs) are a key part of the NHS long-term plan and are intended to bring about major changes in how health and care services are planned, paid for and delivered. ICSs are partnerships that bring together providers and commissioners of NHS services across a geographical area with local authorities and other local partners, to collectively plan and integrate care to meet the needs of their population. ICSs are part of a fundamental shift in the way the health and care system is organised. Following several decades during which the emphasis was on organisational autonomy and the separation of commissioners and providers, ICSs depend instead on collaboration and a focus on places and local populations as the driving forces for improvement.

Shropshire VCS Assembly is represented on the Integrated Care System Shadow Board for Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin. The Shadow ICS Board provides leadership, bringing partners together as a system across statutory and non-statutory health and care providers. There are significant challenges for the Board in its work to support transformational change and improve services in a way that will be sustainable. The Shadow Board considers priorities, population health needs, works to tackle inequalities and ensure best value for money is delivered. Consultation and engagement are key areas of focus. Key priorities include prevention and place-based care, mental health and acute and specialist services.

There is a focus within Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin on the transformation of services, health inequalities and prevention, and organisational development to improve outcomes. The System Improvement Plan (SIP) describes the actions that will be implemented to contribute to the wider system improvement initiatives.

VCS Assembly members have also been contributing to discussions within sub-groups around the development of Primary Care Networks, social prescribing, workforce planning, winter planning and other key topics.

VCSA Change and Compact Group	This group brings together Shropshire Council and other partners with VCSA Board representatives including the Vice Chair, Shadow Chair, two Forum representatives and Compact Champion together to discuss key areas of change, undertake horizon scanning work and pilot new approaches.
Health and Wellbeing Board Including Board, Development Workshops, Comms, Lay Reference Group and other sub groups.	The VCSA has a seat at the Health and Wellbeing Board and fully participates in the work of the Board and its sub groups. The VCSA Chair, Vice Chair and a number of Board representatives support this work.
Health and Wellbeing Communications Group	This group coordinates the circulation and promotion of key health messages across the county. Articles are included in the VCS Assembly newsletter.
Social Taskforce and 3 Sub Groups <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hardship & Poverty Sub Group • Infrastructure & Support Sub Group • Commissioning Review Sub Group 	<p>The Social Task Force has been set up by Shropshire Council in the light of the Coronavirus pandemic. The Taskforce is focussed upon understanding and mitigating the social impacts that will flow from this recession. In essence this is about ensuring the eco-system of social infrastructure support within Shropshire is effective and that multi agency, cross sector plans and actions are in place: all whilst not losing sight of the challenges of so called mega-trends such as ageing demographics, Brexit and high levels of public and personal debt and climate change.</p> <p>The three Sub Groups support the work of the Social Taskforce and drill down some of the finer details.</p>
Care Closer to Home Main group and communications sub group.	The Shropshire Care Closer to Home programme aims to work in partnership to give people in Shropshire access to the care they need closer to where they live, either in their own home or in the community.
Healthy Lives Steering Group	This group is led by Public Health and oversees programmes such as social prescribing.
SATH stakeholder conferences and events	A representative from Shrewsbury and Telford Hospitals attends the VCSA Board and regularly shares information via the Board and VCS Assembly newsletter.
Healthwatch Shropshire Stakeholder Group	The VCSA works in support of Healthwatch Shropshire and has a seat on the stakeholder group.
Shropshire Community Health NHS Trust – Patient and engagement panel	The VCSA values the opportunity to work with the NHS Trust and aims to maintain relationships to ensure key issues are communicated widely.
Shropshire Association of Local Councils Executive	Shropshire VCS Assembly maintains an important partnership with SALC, recognising the issues and challenges shared by the VCS and town and parish councils.
Community Safety Partnership Board	This Board takes an overview of community safety in Shropshire and VCSA involvement ensures connections across sectors are made and maintained.
Social Value Group	Led by Shropshire Council this group brings local commissioners together with the VCSA to understand best practice relating to the Public Services (Social Value) Act.
Social Inclusion Marches LEP	This work will continue over the next few years as the remainder of the European Social Investment Programme is delivered. Large numbers of VCSA members are invited to attend stakeholder events and sign up to communications.
Children’s Trust Including Board and Area Forums	The VCSA is represented in its work with the Children’s trust by the 0-25 Summit. Area forums also allow the wider VCSA membership to get more involved.
Early Help Including Stakeholder Group and Partnership Board	The 0-25 Summit has been working with Shropshire Council to explore and influence changes in the area of Early Help. Information is also circulated via the regular Early Help newsletters.
Shropshire Safeguarding Children’s Board	The VCSA is represented at the Shropshire Safeguarding Children’s Board, providing important VCSE input.
0-25 SEND Strategic Board	A 0-25 Summit representative attends this group. The group oversees deliver of the strategy for children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities and reports to the Shropshire Children’s Trust.
Keeping Adults Safe in Shropshire Board Including sub groups.	The VCSA is represented at the Safeguarding Adults Board and updates are fed through to the VCSA Board.
Mental Health Partnership Board	The Mental Health Partnership Board is a strategic forum to advise and lead the strategic direction of mental health commissioning and service delivery in Shropshire.
And many more.....	There are a range of other occasional events and meetings attended by VCS Assembly representatives.

Board Members

Chris Child	Chair/Active Partnership
Nicola McPherson	Health and Social Care Forum
Laurel Roberts	Local Area and Volunteer Forums Representative
Linda Cox	Compact Champion
Julia Baron	Shropshire Infrastructure Partnership
Heather Osborne	Vice-Chair / Sounding Board
Marie Monk-Hawksworth	Shropshire Community Transport Consortium
Angela Parton	Criminal Justice Forum
Jackie Jeffrey	Co-opted Welfare Reform Lead
Pauline James	Pan Disability Forum
Richard Parkes	0-25 Summit
Tony Green	Green Shropshire Xchange
Dee Plozay	VCS Mental Health Forum
Emily Fay	Food Poverty Alliance

Elected Champion, Shropshire Council Portfolio Holder

The VCS Assembly would like to extend thanks to Councillor Gwilym Butler for the work he continues to undertake with the VCS Assembly Board and wider membership as Shropshire Council's Portfolio Holder for Communities, Place Planning and Regulatory Services.



Support Team

Shropshire VCS Assembly is supported by Shropshire Council through officer support, in-kind support and a small budget for key events. Support is provided by:

Sarah Nelsey, Insight and VCS Engagement Officer

Sarah Dodds, Feedback and Insight Team Leader

Occasional support is also provided by Charlotte Green, Support Officer, Shropshire Council. (Thank you).

Each year the VCS Assembly Board undertakes work to assess priorities for the year ahead in advance of the Annual Assembly. 2020 has been a year like no other and we have all faced challenges of the kind that we have never known before. The Annual Assembly is a great opportunity to obtain feedback from the wider membership and understand key local issues and suggestions for areas of focus. The priorities set out below may be further developed based on feedback from the membership and we encourage all members to keep in touch and share information through the weekly newsletter, forums, VCSA events and by speaking to any member of the VCSA Board or support team.

We look forward to another year working together to highlight the work of the voluntary and community sector in Shropshire. We will continue to undertake work designed to ensure the sector has an active role alongside other local partnerships and organisations at strategic planning meetings and within the development of local policies and programmes. The VCSA recognises the challenges that exist for the sector and also recognises the fantastic work that the sector has carried out and continues to do, despite the Covid-19 pandemic. We hope that collectively we can continue to generate positive changes that can contribute in some way to enable the sector to sustain the important services and activities being delivered across the county.



Priorities for 2020/21

1. Continue to develop, nurture and maintain strong working relationships with Public Sector Partners.
2. Continue to work closely with Shropshire Association of Local Councils, collaborating on projects and events where priorities are shared.
3. Ensure effective communication across the voluntary and community sector by maintaining and promoting the VCSA Assembly newsletter, special Covid-19 bulletins and reviewing and updating the VSA website.
4. Work to develop the VCSA Membership, develop new promotional materials and a new website to explain what the VCS Assembly is, and what it does.
5. Deliver and support events on key themes and areas of interest, to be decided at the Annual Assembly.
6. Contribute to key local strategies including the Cultural Strategy, Community and Rural Strategy for Shropshire and Climate Change Strategy
7. Continue to work closely with Shropshire Council's Social Task Force, Economic Task Force and to feedback the findings of the Commissioning Review Sub Group, Hardship and Poverty Sub Group and Infrastructure and Support Sub Group.
8. Work closely with national and local funding bodies, developing new relationships where needed to influence investments and to hold online workshops with The Community Fund.
9. Further investigate new models or working and national research into financial sustainability, supporting local examples where possible through the gathering of information and networking.
10. Continue to work in close partnership with the Sustainability Transformation Partnership, Shadow Integrated Care System Board and Primary Care Networks.
11. Continue to work in partnership through the Change and Compact Group.
12. Continue to be the voice of the VCSE in Shropshire, working to establish new representation arrangement on request.
13. Continue the core work of the VCSA Board including development of evidence bases, research and impact reporting

Other priorities may be added following discussion at the VCS Annual Assembly and as new issues emerge through 2020/21.



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