



**Shropshire Voluntary
and Community Sector
Assembly**

Annual Report 2022/23

920+

**Current VCSA
newsletter
subscribers**

70+

**VCSA
newsletter bulletins
sent annually**



1,130



**@VCSvoice Twitter
followers**

27+

**Partnership boards and
groups with VCSA
representatives**

£38m+

**Weekly Social Value of
Average Volunteer Hours
in Shropshire this year**

£608m

**Annual charity
expenditure in Shropshire,
Telford & Wrekin**

1,179



**Registered charities and
social enterprises in
Shropshire**

£17m+

**In external grants awarded
to VCSE orgs in
Shropshire**

Heather Osborne

As I finish my tenure as chair of the VCSA I have been reflecting on the saying 'May you live in interesting times' and the last few years have certainly been interesting times for our sector. As Covid 19 struck in the early part of 2020 the VCS leapt into action in numerous ways, reaching out to help those who were struggling during lockdown and dealing with the impact of the pandemic on many peoples' physical and mental health.



We have always known that we were fleet of foot and quick to adapt to change, but we demonstrated it by the bucket load, time and again during the pandemic. While this brought challenges, trying to do so much at that time, it also brought opportunities as we were able to show the importance of the work we do in keeping people safe and well, and many funders were keen to support us during the first year of lockdown. One of the great successes of this time was being able to secure funding for the Shropshire Infrastructure Partnership to enable it to provide help and support to all those small groups and organisations which sprung into being at the start of the lockdown to maintain their sustainability. I wanted to give thanks to all those who lobbied, provided evidence and worked hard to show how important it was to keep these smaller organisations going.

However, the pandemic did have longer-term knock on effects, which we as a sector are still very much experiencing: increased need and demand for services, increasing complexity of need in many services and a reduction in volunteers to help us cope with that demand. This was swiftly followed by the cost-of-living crisis, which is still affecting us as a sector and having a massive impact on many of the people we support. The Shropshire Social Task Force came into being to bring together partners to target help and support to those in greatest need, and much of this work is being driven by our sector, highlighting the impacts and providing powerful evidence of the need in our communities. As the ripples of Covid and the ongoing issues of the costs of living crisis continue the sector is dealing with three key pressures:

- Increasing demand for services
- Funding pressures due to increased costs and grant funding not keeping pace with costs
- Reduction in volunteer numbers

But, we are a resilient sector and as always, we will rise to the challenge. A key role of the VCSA is to lobby and to offer a voice for the sector. We have many excellent people within our sector who do just that, and will continue to highlight the sector's needs during the coming year.

A key piece of work has been engagement with the emerging Integrated Care System and many of us have put considerable hours into this to ensure our sector is well represented and understood in the new structures.

I have really enjoyed my time as chair, how could I not, with such a great bunch of people to work with! And I could not finish without giving my thanks to 'the Sarahs' whose support has been critical in supporting me as chair. Thank you both.

Julie Mellor

I have been working in the Voluntary Sector across Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin for 20 years and am currently the CEO of Taking Part. The past few years have seen significant changes and increased demand on the work of the sector. Being involved with the introduction of the Integrated Care System for Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin has been interesting and challenging as well as focusing on our commissioned services from Shropshire Adult Social Care.

I felt that putting my knowledge, experiences and skills to be Co-Chair for the VCSA would support and help the sector move forward. Only time will tell if I was right. Nic and I have very big shoes to fill as Heather has done such a sterling job of being the previous Chair of the VCSA, and I only have little feet.



Nicola Daniels



The VCSA plays an important role in bringing together voluntary and community sector organisations, sharing information and acting as a voice for the sector. I have been involved since its inception, represented the Health and Care Forum on the Board for many years and was Vice Chair for two years. I am also the Chief Officer of Mayfair Community Centre. At such a time of change it is critical that voluntary and community sector organisations do have a voice.

We need to continue to work together, and with others, to create an environment where groups and organisations however big and small can thrive. Julie and I have a strong commitment to the values of the VCSA and its purpose. We have huge respect for previous chairs who have taken on the role. Taking on the role of Co-Chairs is a big enough challenge, but together with the help of other members of the Board we will do our best to strengthen the VCSA and the sector, so we can best meet community needs.

Departing Colleagues and New Faces

Retirements and new talent

2022 was a year for VCSA Board member retirements, with four of our longstanding Board members starting exciting new journeys in 2022 and early 2023.

The VCSA is so grateful for the many years of dedicated service of these individuals.

From top left: Julia Baron, former Chief Executive of Community Resource and first Chair of the VCSA; Laurel Roberts, former Chief Executive of Qube; Chris Child, former Chief Executive of Energize; and Catherine Kevis, former Managing Director of YSS.

But it is also a great opportunity for us to welcome new faces to the Board and to the work of the VCSA in Shropshire.

The VCSA is thrilled to welcome from top right: Beverley Baxter, new Chief Executive of Community Resource, who will serve as the SIP representative to the Board; Kim Wootton, new Chief Executive of Qube who will serve as Social Prescribing and Volunteer Forums representative to the Board; Pete Ezard, new Chief Executive of Energize, who will serve as the Active Partnerships representative to the Board; and Debb Grantham, new Managing Director of YSS who will serve as Co-opted Board Member for Criminal Justice.



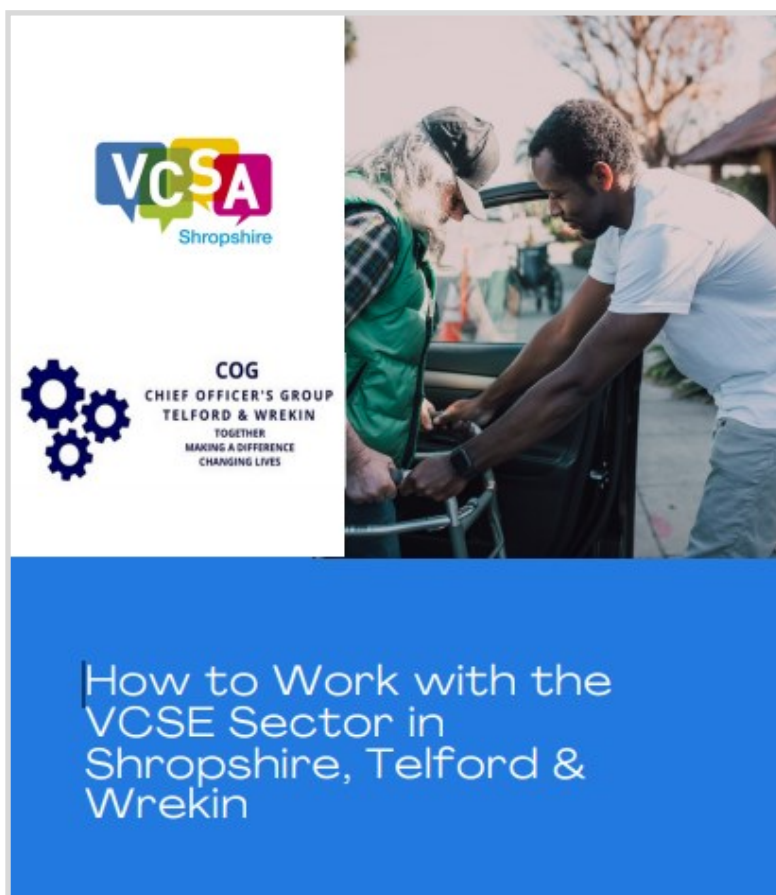
More new faces

Two more new people have also joined the VCSA Board in 2022 and early 2023.

Left: Laura Atyeo is the representative to the Board for the newly instated Social Enterprise Network forum of interest. Laura is the Founding Director of Open Harmony, CIC.

Right: Marianne Grant is the new VCS Engagement and Partnerships Lead, working to embed the VCS more directly into the ICS. Marianne works from Meeting Point House in Telford, but represents the VCSE sector across Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin within the ICS.





VCSA/COG prospectus

In late 2022, the VCSA published a prospectus alongside the Chief Officer's Group (COG) in Telford & Wrekin about how the health and care sector can best work with the voluntary and community sector in Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin. It is a resource that the VCSA encourages all of its members to use beyond health and care as well to communicate how the sector works and how best to engage with us.

New VCSA trifold brochure

The VCSA has produced a printable trifold brochure for members to be able to hand out within their networks. The brochure explains the benefits of joining the VCSA as well as the ways organisations can connect and get involved.

Connect for Free

To sign up for membership and our weekly newsletter, visit us on our website:


vcsvoice.org

Questions? Want to find out more? Email us!

vcsassembly@shropshire.gov.uk


Follow us @VCSVoice and connect with other members on social media

[f](#) [t](#) [i](#)



Being part of the VCSA benefits organisations in so many ways: a collective voice, a shared understanding of what is happening in Shropshire and a joint vision for our county and mutual support for each other

—Julie Mellor, CEO, Taking Part



Shropshire VCSA brings together a diverse range of organisations, from grassroots community groups to registered charities and social enterprises; from organisations with just two volunteers to those with more than one thousand.

Join for free today and be part of a strong, energetic network for the voluntary and community sector in Shropshire!

VCSA Membership

Any voluntary and community sector group or organisation working for the benefit of Shropshire can join free of charge. Your group or organisation can be as active as you choose.

The Assembly allows VCS groups and organisations to:

- Meet and exchange information, ideas and good practice
- Discuss common issues and support each other in delivering services
- Develop shared plans
- Work more closely with public sector bodies such as Shropshire Council



Reasons to Join

VCSA members can benefit in many ways, at any level of involvement:

- Get the latest grant and funding news
- Have the opportunity to have a say through local consultations
- Voice issues and concerns
- Access helpful reports and information
- Network with other VCS groups and organisations
- Express an interest in getting involved in local projects or bids
- Join in at the annual event and attend VCSA events and workshops

Forums of Interest

Forums of Interest are groups of VCS organisations which come together to discuss and address common issues.

Forums of Interest may:

- Deliver similar activities/share aims
- Provide common types of service
- Target similar client groups
- Work together on strategic project planning and funding opportunities

Current Forums of Interest:

- Mental Health Forum
- Health and Social Care Forum
- 0-25 Summit
- Shropshire Community Transport Consortium
- Green Shropshire Xchange
- Shropshire Infrastructure Partnership
- Older People's Sounding Board
- Active Partnerships
- Shropshire Food Poverty Alliance
- Social Enterprise Network

In early 2022, VCSA Board Members developed a list of priorities to work on over the course of 2022/23. At the 2022 Annual Assembly Meeting, members participated in a workshop to develop action items around those priorities, and to help refine them. A big thank you to all who contributed! The result was a VCSA Action Plan for the coming year. The following is a summary of some of the work completed in response to this plan over the course of 2022 and early 2023.

Priority 1: Collaboration

Increasing and strengthening existing opportunities for collaboration in the sector

Progress:

- In the past year, the VCSA has supported the relaunch of regular, in-person meetings of the Mental Health Forum. The first two meetings of this group resulted in over 30 attendees at each, representing 19 different organisations.
- The VCSA has also welcomed and helped to support a new forum of interest, the Social Enterprise Network, which has already started to generate new membership and have held one in-person and one online networking meeting so far.
- The VCSA continues to work within the partnership Board of the ICS, establishing links and partnerships across STW.
- The VCSA continues to work closely with Healthwatch Shropshire and with the Shropshire Association of Local Councils (SALC) on consultations and other relevant projects to better reach local communities.

Priority 2: Addressing Inequalities

Working to address inequalities caused by the Cost-of-Living crisis, including health and financial inequalities, loneliness, and rural isolation.

Progress:

- The VCSA's leadership on the Hardship and Poverty Group has had a huge impact on the way in which the local authority has managed the cost-of-living crisis, including input into the communications and information around cost-of-living crisis and helping to establish Shropshire's Warm Welcome offer this past winter.
- VCSA leaders were involved in drafting and signing a letter to MPs sent by the Shropshire Social Task Force highlighting the rural inequalities heightened by the cost-of-living crisis.
- The VCSA and its members have led on research into local access to cost-of-living help as well as the impacts of the cost-of-living crisis on the local VCS sector.
- The VCSA is working more closely with the local authority to help integrate VCS data into the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment moving forward, but these are still preliminary discussions.

Priority 3: ICS

Working to embed the ICS within the VCS

Progress:

- The VCSA has created a prospectus that showcases the connections within the sector to wider audiences in the community, the ability of the sector to lead on prevention, and explains how best to engage with the sector in Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin through the VCSA and the Chief Officer's Group (COG).
- VCSA representation is present within key groups in the local ICS and the MPFT, where leaders help to get the sector's priorities onto the agenda, and its voice heard. This work is ongoing.
- The VCSA worked closely with the ICB to establish and recruit for a ICS/VCSE Engagement and Partnership Lead. This individual, Marianne Grant, is now in post at Meeting Point House in Telford, and already establishing greater connections across the ICS and VCS in Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin.

Priority 4: Membership & Inclusion

Developing VCSA membership, bringing new voices to the table and highlighting the work of the sector.

Progress:

- A new Social Enterprise Network brings CICs to the Board and to other representational opportunities and engagement within the VCSA, enhancing the voice of an important part of the sector.
- A new digital membership platform collects more useful data on members to be able to better communicate members' needs and impact on the county. Ease of sign-up and ability to update their information will also increase member accessibility.
- VCSA engagement with grassroots groups has improved, with attendance at Community Connector meetings and other place-based events, as well as collaboration with the Shropshire Infrastructure Partnership Community Development Team to encourage more grassroots participation in the VCSA.
- Creation of a new VCSA brochure to better communicate the benefits of membership and collaboration.
- Improved social media presence to more quickly and easily communicate with members about important sector news.
- Increased VCSA newsletter subscribers from 300+ at the beginning of 2021 to 850+ at the beginning of 2022.
- 12 small to mid-sized groups featured on the VCSA website and newsletter in 2022.

Priority 5: Sustainability

Supporting and sustaining the VCS to ensure that it remains vibrant and robust in the wake of the pandemic and cost-of-living crisis

Progress:

- Introduction of one new forum of interest and the revitalisation of two others post-pandemic.
- Research and report produced on the impacts of the cost-of-living crisis on the VCSE sector in Shropshire. Findings have been shared widely throughout Shropshire Council, with partner organisations and among VCS groups and organisations.
- Regular funding news is shared in the VCSA newsletter, and "funding roundups" of grant opportunities tailored to Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin VCSE organisations are shared quarterly with upcoming deadlines.
- Close collaboration with and regular referrals to the Shropshire Infrastructure Partnership Community Development Team and Community Connectors.
- Continuing to collaborate with, and promote, the work of the Shropshire Infrastructure Partnership (SIP) and its members, which provide infrastructure support to hundreds of voluntary and community groups across Shropshire.
- Formal response to the 2023/24 Shropshire Council budget consultation.

The VCSA Board leads on a number of initiatives to enhance the voice of the sector in Shropshire. Below are updates on some of the work with which the VCSA Board was deeply engaged in 2022 and early 2023.

Hardship and Poverty Group and Cost-of-Living Response

The Hardship and Poverty Group was established as a sub-committee of the Shropshire Social Task Force in 2020 to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic in a collaborative way across statutory and voluntary sector organisations in Shropshire. In 2022, it was revived to help meet the growing crisis around the cost-of-living. The group met monthly throughout 2022 and early 2023 and is now meeting quarterly. It is chaired by VCSA Vice Chair Jackie Jeffrey, CEO of Citizens Advice Shropshire, and includes representatives from organisations across the VCSE sector working on hardship and poverty issues.

The group worked closely with the Council to create and spread the word about the Cost-of-living support resources available on the Council's website. It also worked closely with the public health team to support the effort to create and publicise Shropshire's Warm Welcome throughout the county during the winter. The Hardship and Poverty Group now sets the agenda for the work of the Social Task Force, and its ongoing remit is to identify areas for action and problem solve and advocate for changes in the local system that will help improve the lives of the people of Shropshire.

UKSPF Steering Groups

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) is a Government-allocated fund which is intended to reduce inequalities between communities, as part of the Government's wider "levelling up" agenda. The total funding allocated to Shropshire across three major funding streams was £12,255,281. The VCSA nominated two representatives to serve on the steering groups for the Community and Place as well as the People and Skills streams of funding. Another VCSA member also represented the voice of social enterprise on the Supporting Local Business steering group.

Calls for these funding streams have now gone out, and applications are under consideration to deliver these funds into the community.

Shropshire Council Budget Consultation Response

Further to the invitation from Shropshire Council to consult on its 2023/24 budget, the VCSA submitted a two-page response to the proposals in February 2023. The Board's submission asked for clarification and detail on a number of items that appeared to have impacts for voluntary sector services, contracts and grant funding. The Board is awaiting further engagement opportunities on some of the elements of Shropshire Council's proposals.

ICS and MPFT Integration with the Sector

Board members continue to be actively involved in integrating the ICS within the work of the work of the VCSE across Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin. This has included giving presentations on working with the sector at the Shropshire Integrated Place Partnership Board (SHIPP), the Telford & Wrekin Integrated Place Partnership Board (TWIPP), representing the sector at meetings regarding the proposed Shrewsbury Wellbeing Hub, participating in and hosting events for "The Big Conversation" and much more. Additionally, the VCSA has hosted events to help integrate the work of the MPFT into the sector in Shropshire with regard to their Community Mental Health Transformation.

In 2022, the VCSA started to digitise and refresh its membership. After the pandemic, it became evident that some members had gone through significant changes, some had closed, and new VCSE organisations had also opened their doors across Shropshire. It was clear that the time was right to recruit fresh voices into the VCSA and to update the details of our current members in way that would make it easier for them to engage with the VCSA and with each other.

The membership refresh is taking place in three stages:

Stage 1

The first stage of our membership refresh involves **moving our current members over to the new digital format** for membership. If your organisation has not already completed the digital membership form, we ask that you please do so as soon as possible. This will allow:

- The VCSA to have more up to date information on sector organisations in Shropshire
- The annual State of the Sector Survey to take approximately 10 minutes less time to complete
- Members to more easily update their own information
- The VCSA to better target information and opportunities to its members

If your organisation has not yet renewed your membership through our digital form, please do so as soon as possible. You can access the form via our website: <https://www.vcsvoice.org/about-the-vcsa/membership/>

Stage 2

The second stage of our membership refresh involves **inviting new members** from the VCSE sector in Shropshire to join us. By using national registration data for charities and CICs, we were able to create a list of a few hundred registered organisations in Shropshire that are not yet VCSA members. Information and joining invitations are being systematically sent to these organisations in batches and new members are continuing to join our ranks through this process.

Stage 3

In the final stage of our membership refresh, we will **make our members more visible**. We plan to make a list of our members accessible on our website, with a way to search for members according to their services as well as alphabetically. This will make it easier for:

- Members to connect with each other
- External partners to better target information and opportunities for our members

Thank you to all of our members for taking part in this refresh, but most of all thank you for taking part in the work of the VCSA. Your participation makes our collective voice stronger.

Overview

In early 2022, the VCSA conducted its first 'State of the Sector' survey since 2017. The aim of the survey was to evaluate the current needs of VCSE organisations, as well as to evidence the value of the sector to the county. In March 2023, the VCSA once again conducted the State of the Sector Survey, so that two consecutive years of data are now available for comparison.

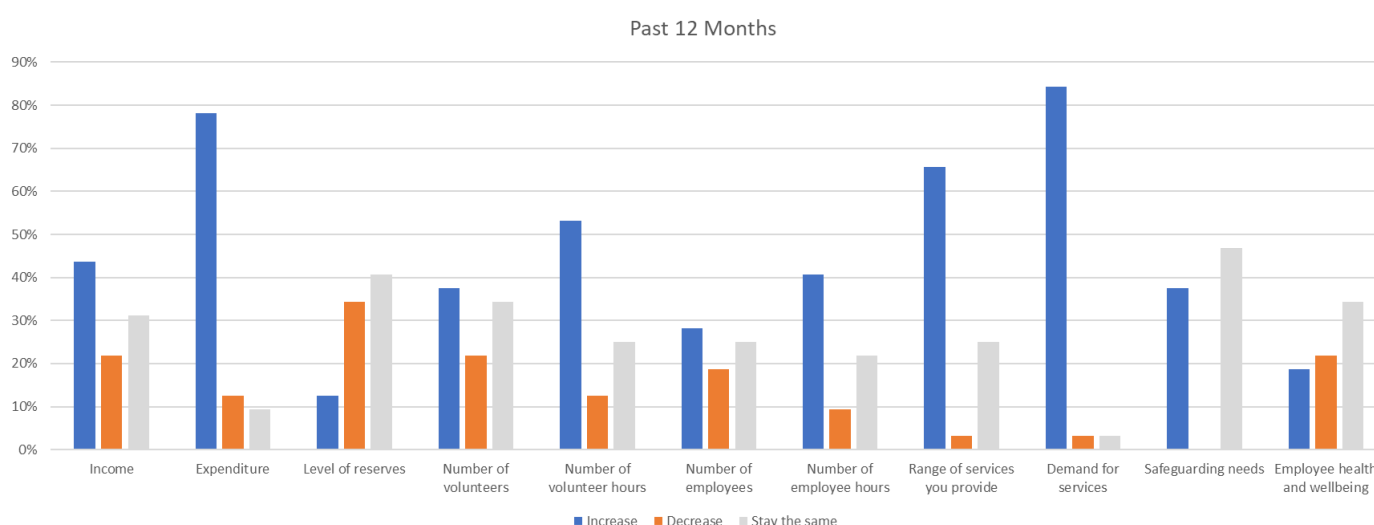
The full 2022 State of the Sector Report was published in June 2022 and is available to download from the VCSA website, while the full 2023 report will be published later in July 2023.

Key Findings

The latest State of the Sector survey reveals a mixed environment for the sector, with some organisations seeing incomes increase and others seeing decreases in their incomes and levels of reserves. Similarly, some organisations are seeing declines in volunteers and volunteering hours, but slightly more are seeing increases this year in their volunteering, which is good news for the sector, where national headlines are still talking about the decline of volunteering overall.

The biggest percentage increases are in expenditure and service demands, which possibly means that many organisations are feeling pressures from the cost-of-living crisis and the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on the wider population.

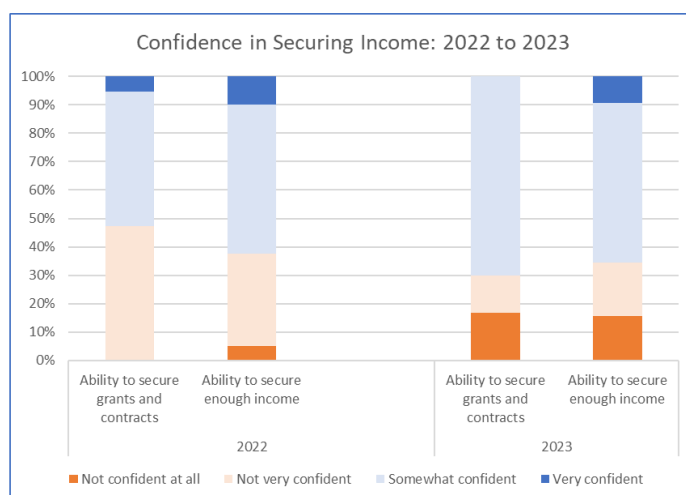
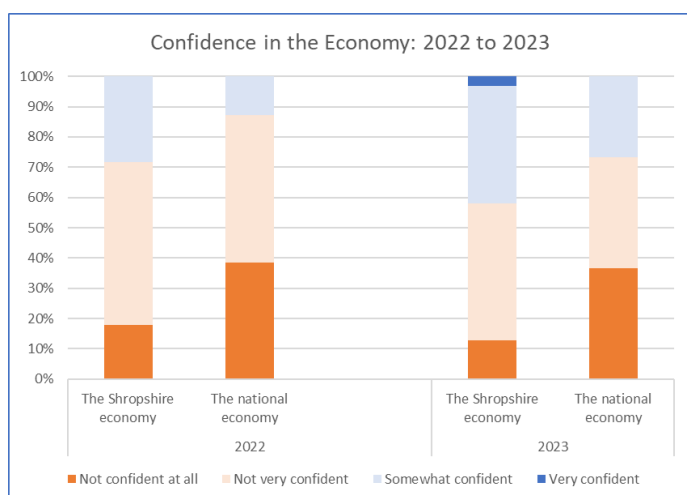
Income and volunteering rises for some, but expenditure and service demands see the highest percentage increases in the last year



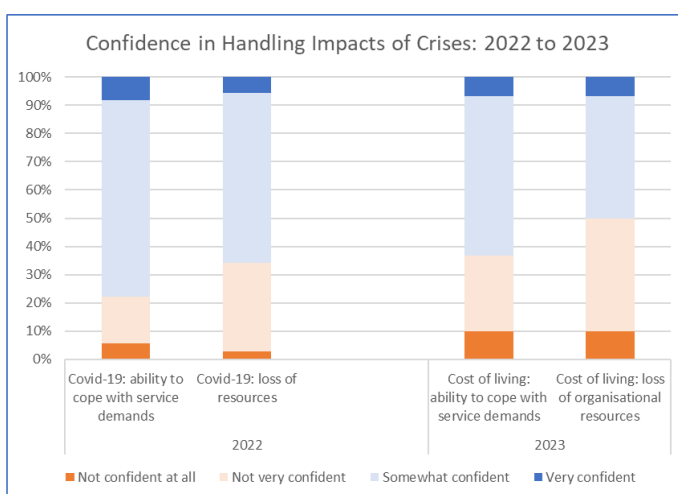
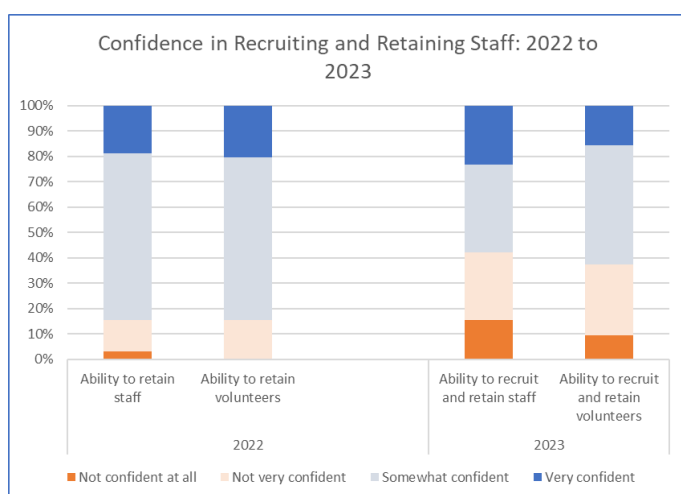
Key Findings (continued)

When comparing the results of the last two surveys in terms of confidence levels for the year ahead, there are some more positive outlooks about the overall economy, but some mixed views about the ability to secure enough income in the year ahead. VCSE organisations in Shropshire also have slightly less confidence in recruitment and retention of staff and volunteers this year compared with last year, and slightly less confidence in their ability to cope with the impacts of the cost-of-living crisis in the year ahead than they did with their ability to cope with the impacts of Covid last year.

Slightly better outlook on the economy this year; more divided outlook on securing income



Slightly less confidence this year about recruitment and retention and the ability to cope with the impacts of crises



Overview:

In summer of 2022, it became clear that a national cost-of-living crisis would be a major focus of the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector (VCSE) in the months and perhaps years ahead. At this time, very little national research was available on how the looming crisis would impact the sector itself, not just individual households. For this reason, the Shropshire Voluntary and Community Sector Assembly (VCSA) undertook some local research to understand how the cost-of-living crisis would impact the VCSE sector in Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin. Download the full report on the VCSA website.

Key Findings:

Shropshire's VCSE sector is struggling with staff and volunteer recruitment, retention and mental health

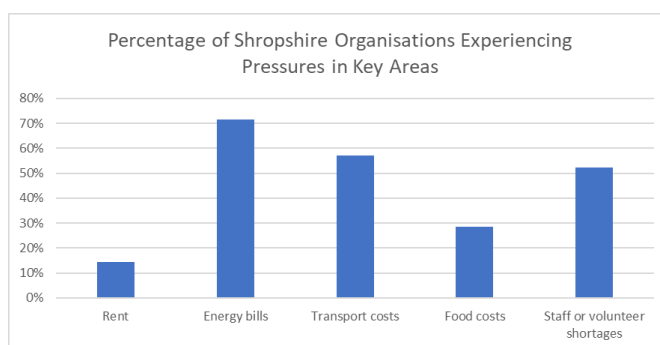
There is a lot of national level to support the fact that the VCSE sector is struggling with low pay, burnout and a decrease in volunteering. This was also the conclusion most supported by local evidence, which showed a decline in organisations' levels of volunteer application and recruitment, as well as an increased difficulty in recruiting for staff roles in recent months. Moreover, evidence from the survey and the VCSA Mental Health networking event shed light on a burgeoning mental health crisis in the sector among staff and volunteers who are facing increased pressures.

Mental health concerns are important to address in and of themselves, but they also feed into other issues raised in this report, including problems recruiting and retaining staff, as well as capacity issues with meeting increasing service demands. All three of these things work together to reinforce each other and exponentially increase the challenges posed for organisations. Addressing the mental health and wellbeing of staff and volunteers working in the VCSE sector should therefore be an immediate priority.

Energy bills are the number one financial pressure for Shropshire's VCSE organisations, and these increases are hard to cover with current funding

Shropshire VCSE organisations listed energy bills as their top financial pressure in the survey, but this is also the top pressure listed in national data among VCSE organisations. This was reflected by an urgent November 2022 call from the NCVO for the national government to continue its energy relief scheme for voluntary organisations.

"Charities are particularly vulnerable to rising energy costs because of the nature of the services they run and how they generate income. They can't simply put up their prices like a private business might do." As one Shropshire-based organisation said *"it is not easy to recoup energy price rises when you are receiving your funding through a grant or contract that is already pre-set"*. It is in these circumstances that organisations must rely on reserves that may have already been depleted during the Covid-19 crisis.



Shropshire organisations are seeing increased service demands alongside increased costs, which don't necessarily correspond with increased income

While a few organisations reported increased income in the survey, a majority of organisations had their income either decrease or remain the same, which national data demonstrates is typical of the sector currently. However, even when income remains the same, increases in the cost of operations and increases in demands for services can mean effective financial losses for organisations. This leads to a decrease in overall financial resilience, such as that reported by the Charities Aid Foundation and other national bodies supporting charities in the UK.

Even the small sample size of just 10 organisations responding in Wave 4 captured one upcoming charity closure. The loss of even one organisation operating for years in Shropshire represents not just a loss of crucial local services at a time when service demands are increasing dramatically, but also unique on-the-ground local knowledge and experience. This highlights the stark need for more investment in the sector in order to maintain and sustain the value that organisations with many years delivering services. It also suggests that more research on the sector's financial sustainability is needed in the near future.

Shropshire Food Poverty Alliance

The past year has been a busy one for the Shropshire Food Poverty Alliance (SFPA) with cost-of-living crisis having huge implications for the levels of food insecurity in Shropshire's communities.

The scale of challenge means partnership working has been key for the SFPA. The SFPA has been part of Shropshire Council's Social Taskforce, working with others to produce communications materials such as a [new video](#) which aims to help overcome some of stigma which prevents people from coming forward for support. The SFPA has fed into local level policy decisions such as the allocation of the Household Support Fund and played a key role in developing and delivering [cost-of-living briefing sessions](#) which reached more than 500 frontline staff and volunteers. It has worked with partners to update the [Shropshire 'Worrying About Money?' leaflet](#) and distribute close to 30,000 copies.

The SFPA continues to support food banks as the demand they are seeing reaches record levels. It has facilitated training sessions with the Samaritans to support food banks support an increasingly complex cohort of clients whilst also looking after their own well-being.

The SFPA has worked closely with Shropshire Council's Public Health team to increase the uptake of the Healthy Start scheme, to deliver training to the Holiday Activity and Food programme providers on how to provide inclusive, non-stigmatising food provision for children and has also fed into the development of the county's Healthier Weight Strategy. It works closely with the newly formed Shropshire Good Food Partnership, leading their 'Healthy Food For All' working group.

The SFPA has also coordinated an open [letter on the impact of the cost-of-living crisis](#) signed by more than 30 Shropshire based organisations, created a [Poverty Fact File](#) for the SFPA website, submitted evidence to the All Party Parliamentary Group on ending the need for food banks and met with Shropshire's MPs to discuss raising the free school meal eligibility threshold.

Voluntary Sector Mental Health Forum

While members of the Forum have not formally met in person during the year, collaboration and communication continued between some individual partners. Several members have been actively involved and representing the sector in County and Area partnerships, groups and collaboration.

Information was disseminated via email and proposals for re-establishing meetings of the Forum were shared amongst members. In the aftermath of the pandemic, working practices changed for many and opportunities for networking were still limited. This effected the small, independent groups as well as larger organisations in the county. The type of support and how it was delivered diversified according to the new needs identified and while there have been individual examples of good practice, some areas of previous work have not yet been reintroduced or replaced.

It is the intention to relaunch the Mental Health Forum early in 2023 with a networking event followed by regular scheduled meetings and agreed priorities for the work of the forum. The Mental Health Forum is currently refreshing its membership and updating the mailing list. Groups and organisations of any size, operating in the geographical area, whose aim is to support the mental health and wellbeing of its clients and beneficiaries, are most welcome.

Green Shropshire Xchange

GSX is the network of the local environmental groups in Shropshire. Our AGM in October 2022 celebrated 10 years by reflecting on the work of the main issues of Transport, Biodiversity and Renewable Energy.

We continue to support the Climate Action Partnerships, Zero Carbon Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin Borough Climate Action and South Shropshire Climate Action, with the delivery of Net Zero Carbon. We also support the Good Food Partnership and link with the work of the Marches Energy Agency and the Shropshire Wildlife Trust.

The local groups organise events and give support to local communities and councils.

0-25 Summit

The summit has been in recovery mode this year, reconnecting with young people, parents and communities. The group has also been trying to increase its membership from the core 7 members (Autism West Midlands, Empathy for special children, Energize, Movement Centre, PACC, South Shropshire Youth Forum and SYA). We now include NSPCC, TACMAC, Hope House, Rural Art Hub, and Scrappies.

The youth sector in Shropshire recovered last year, growing close to pre-covid levels thanks to the contribution made by our partners and the smaller organisations, clubs and groups they support. An example of our work is typified in this case study:

Actio is a voluntary sector consortium created by Energize Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin; Ignition and PACC Shropshire, who have come together to improve and develop the community-based activity offer for children and young people with Special Educational Needs & Disabilities, and their families. Actio recognises the important contribution that participation in community-based activities makes to both the physical and mental health of children and young people with SEND who often face significant barriers to accessing activities.

Actio was commissioned to manage the “All In” activity programme on behalf of Shropshire Council, including the promotion of the scheme. This has resulted in the All In membership growing to over 800 young people, providing SEND families with more easily accessible information about community based activities and increased access to opportunities designed to meet their needs. Actio has also extended the offer to include a wider range of sport and arts based activities, identifying new funding opportunities to grow the programme and develop a new activity offer for the 18-25 group. You can find out more about Actio on their website www.actio.org.uk

We anticipate that 2023/24 will add to the challenges while we get to grips with the cost-of-living crisis and ongoing crisis in children and young people’s mental health.

Older People's Sounding Board

During 2022/23 the Sounding Board has continued to be a virtual group, only one public meeting was held in May 2023 as part of the ICS Big Conversation consultation. However, attendance was low and the numbers of older people attending the Sounding Board have fallen away since the start of the pandemic. The majority of members and attendees at events appear to be other organisations or individuals which work with and support older people, rather than the older people themselves.

As a result Age UK Shropshire Telford & Wrekin decided to focus their time on outreach work to engage with older people in their communities and at local events, rather than at public meetings. We have also used the windows at Bellstone in Shrewsbury to promote a number of key events which might be of interest to older people, including support available for those who are struggling financially, carers support, LGBT History month and Windrush Day.

We continue to campaign on the issue of digital exclusion of older people as this is an ongoing and increasing issue and we must ensure that, those older people who cannot use digital technology are not left behind or lose out. Later in the year we will be reviewing the Sounding Board to see how we can re-engage with local older people and identify the best way to hear their voices and views.

Shropshire Community Transport Consortium

Shropshire Community Transport Consortium represents not-for profit community transport groups throughout Shropshire. All groups provide local transport for otherwise isolated people, unable to access public transport due to its unavailability or their restricted physical mobility. Historically community transport predominantly focused on providing transport to medical appointments, minibuses or dial-a-ride type minibuses. A valuable service reliant upon volunteers that also helps those that are disabled or elderly, to remain independent and feel a part of their community.

The Covid-19 pandemic saw groups needing to adapt and evolve in response to their members' needs whilst continuing to fulfil school contract obligations. Initially this focused on supporting those that were vulnerable or shielding but swiftly expanded to providing welfare type services – such as befriending and welfare calls. Once restrictions eased there was huge demand for shopping and leisure trips as members longed for social opportunities and to “just get back out again as normal”.

Most groups have continued to provide their additional support services from the pandemic, sometimes as part of a larger Good Neighbour offering, alongside their core services. Some groups are experiencing incredibly high levels of medical journeys and we are monitoring this situation for future sustainability. In the last 12 months over 10,000 medical passenger journeys have been completed across the County. There are over 3,500 members undertaking over 115,000 journeys through Dial a Ride service (an average of 32 journeys per year per person). In addition, some 2,586 wheelchair journeys are provided.

Social Enterprise Network

The Social Enterprise Network joined the VCSA in 2022 as a new Forum of Interest.

The forum aims to:

- Raise awareness and understanding of social enterprise – educate, campaign and celebrate.
- Support Social Businesses to gain competence, sustainability, share best practice, improve leadership.
- Promote good practice.
- Work with SEUK to bring about the formation and implementation of Social Enterprise Strategy and to regain/sustain our SE UK Social Enterprise Place Status.
- Make links with local private sector organisations and network groups to promote the value of Social Enterprise economy.
- Promote and showcase the work and success of local social enterprises through marketing and events.
- Inform and influence the relevance to the social enterprise sector and specifically to help to:
 - ⇒ Foster a culture of social enterprise
 - ⇒ Ensure the right information and advice are available to social enterprises
 - ⇒ Enable social enterprises to have access to appropriate finance and funding
 - ⇒ Grow the sustainable social enterprise economy
 - ⇒ Increase access to local services
 - ⇒ Coordinate sector development and resourcing.

Active Partnerships

2022 has probably been our busiest and most varied since we established Energize as the lead development body for physical activity and sport across Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin. Following the debilitating impact of Covid in 2020 and 2021, we have seen a return to pre-pandemic levels of physical activity, however there is still more we need to do to address the inequalities that exist across our communities.

Our Schools work continues to grow through a range of delivery projects including Creating Active Schools, School Games and Opening Schools Facilities with evidence of increased activity levels across young people.

Across our communities we continue to raise the profile of physical activity through membership of voluntary and community networks, and through the use of programmes to connect with those participants facing barriers to an active lifestyle. As such we have created a sustainable falls prevention project; a sport intervention programme for young people at risk of mainstream exclusion; developed provision for SEND young people and their families; and continue to support local sports clubs and physical activity organisations through our Together Fund.

In 2022 our Tackling Inequalities Fund closed. 73 projects were funded, over £147,000 distributed addressing inequalities for 2676 project beneficiaries. 29 organisations were charities, 21 community/volunteer-led organisations, 15 social enterprises and 6 not-for-profit companies.

Strategically we developed a 4-year business plan which now drives our strategic objectives. This recognises our work as a 'system partner' to deliver the Sport England 'Uniting the Movement' strategy.

Finally, 2022 brought changes both a Board level and a new CEO. We welcomed several new Trustees this year with a broad range of expertise and skills to drive the organisation forward in 2023 and beyond. In addition, Chris Child stepped down as CEO and Pete Ezard was appointed as his successor in late 2022.

Voluntary Sector Health & Social Care Forum

The Voluntary Sector Health and Social Care Forum provides an opportunity for organisations and groups keep up to date with and contribute to developments in health and care locally, share information, support and learn from each other. Members meet roughly twice a year. In June Edna Boampong, Director of Communications and Engagement, Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin Integrated Care System, came to talk with us about the new Integrated Care system and the role of the Voluntary Sector. In our meeting in November we continued the discussion as a group and met with Dr Charlotte Hart to talk about the Shrewsbury Health and Wellbeing Hub.

Community Resource, through Julia Baron and Sue Chalk, have provided administration for the Forum, sent out numerous updates and hosted meetings at their buildings in Shrewsbury. We are really grateful for their support.

How Can I Join or Create A Forum of Interest?

If you are interested in joining the collaborative work of one of the VCSA's Forums of Interest, you can contact us at vcasassembly@shropshire.gov.uk, or you can email the forum chair directly (details on our website).

If you want to discuss starting a new forum of interest around a topic or theme that you this is important to have representation for within the sector, then contact one of our co-chairs for an initial discussion, or email us at vcasassembly@shropshire.gov.uk.

Representation Summary



Marches Local Enterprise Partnership VCS elected representative	the LEP Board is comprised of local authority leaders and key sector representatives Sonia Roberts is the elected VCS representative and gives regular reports to the VCSA Board.
Integrated Care Board (ICB) and Integrated Care Partnership (ICP)	One VCS representative from Shropshire (currently, this is Jackie Jeffrey as VCSA Vice Chair), and one from Telford sit as non-voting members on the STW Integrated Care Board, which is responsible for overall health provision in Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin. Additionally, the VCSA is represented at the Integrated Care Partnership, which is responsible for putting together the integrated care strategy for the region.
Shropshire Social Task Force	Brings together key partners, stakeholders and organisations from across the County, to tackle the social impacts of the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis. Heather Osborne, Jackie Jeffrey and Sophie Padgett (formerly) represent the VCSA.
Hardship and Poverty Group	VCS organisations lead and set the agenda for this sub-group of the Social Task Force. Jackie Jeffrey (chairs) and Sonia Roberts report to the VCSA Board.
Health and Wellbeing Board 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. Jackie Jeffrey represents and Nicola Daniels deputises.
Shropshire Integrated Place Partnership (SHIPP)	The purpose of SHIPP is to act as a partnership board of commissioners, providers of health and social care and involvement leads in Shropshire, to ensure that the system level outcomes and priorities agreed at ICS and Programme boards are implemented at place level in Shropshire Julie Mellor serves as the VCSA representative, Heather Osborne deputises.
STW Anticipatory Care Group	Anticipatory Care working group, now known as Proactive Care, which will help design a draft operating model for anticipatory care work (read: case-based prevention) across Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin. Nicola Daniels and Kevin Moore (of Age UK) represent the sector on this group.
Digital Strategy Advisory Group (ICS)	Brought together to advise on the ICS digital strategy. Rob Smith from Age UK sits on this group and reports to the VCSA Board.
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. Richard Parkes represent the VCSA.
Making it Real	There are close links between the VCSA and the experts by experience leading on the Making it Real Board. Julie Mellor represents the VCSA.
Community Mental Health Transformation Steering Committee	The CMH Transformation aims to improve access and outcomes for individuals with Severe Mental Illness. The transformation covers the Integrated Care System and involves all partners involved in the delivery of care including NHS providers, Local Authority and Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE).
Early Help Partnership Board	Multi-agency group responsible for the review of the Early Help Strategy. Richard Parkes is the VCSA representative.
Learning Disability Partnership Board Learning Disability and Autism Board	Multi-agency group responsible for the review of the Learning Disability Strategy. Julie Mellor is the VCSA representative.
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. Jackie Jeffrey is the VCSA representative.
Shropshire Bus Partnership Board for the Bus Services Improvement Plan	Linda Cox or Marie Monk-Hawkesworth attend on behalf of the Community Transport Consortium, a VCSA Forum of Interest.
Making it Real Board	Offers people the chance to discuss their concerns, experiences and views on how adult social care services can be improved. Julie Mellor is the VCSA representative

Board Members

Julie Mellor	Shropshire Integrated Place Partnership (SHIPP) Representative and Co-Chair
Nicola Daniels	Health and Social Care Forum Representative and Co-Chair
Jackie Jeffrey	Co-opted Board Member for Money Advice and Vice Chair
Kim Wootton (replaces Laurel Roberts)	Social Prescribing and Volunteer Forums Representative
Linda Cox	Compact Champion
Beverley Baxter	Shropshire Infrastructure Partnership Representative
Heather Osborne	Older People's Sounding Board Representative
Marie Monk-Hawksworth	Shropshire Community Transport Consortium Representative
Debb Grantham (replaces Catherine Kevis)	Co-opted Board Member for Criminal Justice
Pete Ezard (replaces Chris Child)	Active Partnerships Representative
Richard Parkes	0-25 Summit Representative
Tony Green	Green Shropshire Xchange Representative
Dee Plozay	VCS Mental Health Forum Representative
Vacant (formerly Sophie Padgett)	Shropshire Food Poverty Alliance Representative
Lynn Cawley	Healthwatch Shropshire Representative
Sonia Roberts	Marches LEP VCS Representative
Laura Atyeo	Social Enterprise Forum Representative

Elected Champion, Shropshire Council Portfolio Holder:

The VCS Assembly would like to extend thanks to: Councillor Cecilia Motley, Portfolio Holder for Communities, Culture, Leisure & Tourism and Transport.



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 Hampson, Insight and VCS Engagement Officer

Sarah Dodds, Feedback and Insight Team Leader

Charlotte Green, Support Officer for the Feedback and Insight Team

The Year Ahead/Priorities for 2023/24



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.

Each year the VCS Assembly Board undertakes work to assess priorities for the year ahead in advance of the Annual Assembly. 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 will be further considered and developed based on feedback from the membership at the Annual Assembly meeting in July 2023, 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.

Our current priorities remain:

- 1. Increasing and strengthening existing opportunities for collaboration in the sector**
- 2. Working to address inequalities caused by the Cost-of-living crisis, including health and financial inequalities, loneliness, and rural isolation.**
- 3. Working to embed the ICS within the VCS**
- 4. Developing VCSA membership, bringing new voices to the table and highlighting the work of the sector.**
- 5. Supporting and sustaining the VCS to ensure that it remains vibrant and robust in the wake of the pandemic and cost-of-living crisis**

Other priorities may be added or these may be adjusted following discussion at the VCS Annual Assembly and as new issues emerge through 2023/24.

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

To find out more about the VCS Assembly and access our key publications please visit: www.vcsvoice.org

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