



Empowering Communities

**Our Strategic Plan
to sustain and strengthen
the voluntary sector
in Staffordshire
2016-2025**

Updated by the Board of Trustees October 2021 (v5)

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What is Support Staffordshire trying to achieve?

Support Staffordshire **empowers communities** to be the best they can be. It supports **communities, individuals** and **organisations** to work **in collaboration** to **bring about positive change** in their community by **actively encouraging Social Action**

Our services aim to:

- increase people's skills and knowledge
- harness people's drive, enthusiasm and energy
- enhance individual and family livelihoods
- build capacity in neighbourhoods & communities
- improve the relationships and resilience of organisations and individuals

We deliver in three main ways:

- Advancing Individual Social Action and Volunteering For All
- Supporting Community and Organisational Development, especially through effective, influential and local, voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations.
- Convening Across Organisations and Collaborating with a Strong Collective Voice; in recognition that VCSE organisations are interdependent on a myriad of other local organisations, public bodies and local businesses with the same aims.

How will we go about this? Our Ethos

1. Positive Community, Family and Person Centred

We take an assets (skills, experience, knowledge, connections, capacity & potential) approach in supporting communities, families and individuals

This is focused on what people can do, not what they cannot. We support this by addressing people's needs and vulnerabilities.

We believe organisations should facilitate and support in ways that are backed by appropriate evidence. We never impose external solutions; these rarely work and never last.

2. Local Focus and Empowerment

We seek understanding, develop solutions and make decisions with and as close to those affected as possible.

The greater the distance between power and impact; the greater the risk of long-term failure.

We don't seek to do what people can better do for themselves.

3. Sharing, Learning, Resilience

We recognise the important role of innovation and learning from experience as we go, rather than only being concerned with the end outcome.

Sharing information and understanding should be automatic where it benefits people and communities.

Resilience can mean learning to do things differently as well as recovering from setbacks.

4. Fairness and Equality

Everyone has something to give and should be given a fair chance to reach their potential.

The most excluded should be supported to fulfil their talent and ambition.

5. Building Relationships of Trust

People succeed when they work together for a common good.

Trusting one another to act with integrity and commitment demands compassion, honesty, transparency, respect and time

Long-term Economic Outlook and Strategy

What has historically been known as Voluntary Sector Infrastructure or CVS-type services have lost significant favour from central government and previously important funders including the National Lottery, since around 2013.

Traditional sources of local funding from local authorities and the NHS remain under sustained pressure through this current period of austerity, and this continues to impact and limit wider investment in our work as we have an unstable base from which to work.

Marketisation, though perhaps less explicit a driver than a few years ago, remains a significant factor in our service changes; meaning a trend or at least an external pressure towards the 'customer' paying for service from the bottom up. This has also introduced an element of greater competition for our services both within the CVS sector and with private consultants and advisers.

In 2014 an Independent Commission on the 'Future of Local Infrastructure' gave a ringing endorsement of the role of infrastructure and put the case for state and local authority investment, but held back from giving a firm view on the market approach.

Marketisation whilst perhaps bearable with regard to support services says little about the other CVS-like functions. Our role as the convenor and champion is not adequately recognised or resourced by investors, nor has a fee structure been possible to establish or make sufficient in this regard.

In mid- 2018 the Office for Civil Society published its long awaited Civil Society Strategy. The strategy does recognise the need for local support systems, though it steers away from equating this to CVSs. It is also extremely light on how the strategy is to be implemented or resourced. At the time of updating (September 2021) the established Minister for Civil Society, Baroness Barran has moved on and not been replaced, as part of the 2021 reshuffle. The sector thus remains in a weak place in terms of central government leadership and relations.

However, the Covid-19 pandemic has changed something. Many of the arms of government, both local and national has a new found respect for the VCSE sector and are much more willing to speak up for us and in support of developing the relationship further. A recent Local Government Association (LGA) County Councils Network Report, reflected extremely well on the role of the VCSE sector in the response and ongoing recovery from the pandemic, and it named the CVS network explicitly.

That said, the likely coming austerity round two (budget and spending review due October 2021), for the public sector is a significant concern.

In this context, Support Staffordshire continues to need to:

- Manage costs effectively, sustaining our balanced or small surplus performance of recent years
- Further grow our now established paid for consultancy and training services; developing new services based upon the needs of our members

- Sustain our relationships with third party investors in the statutory and independent funder sector, that allow us to maintain a free core offer of information, advice and guidance, based primarily on community need
- Develop unrestricted income from donors, both corporate and individual
- Maintain trading related income from effective use of building assets in Burton and Newcastle-under-Lyme; and extend sustainable building assets where appropriate
- Actively manage our free reserves through investment and endowments

Strategic Aims

Drawing together our strategic purpose, the context in which we are operating and the financial resources at our disposal, we have proposed the following four Strategic Aims which we believe will remain critical over the next decade or so of Support Staffordshire's evolution.

Aim 1: Empowering Communities

We will make the most of our assets, consistently improving on these foundations and learning across the organisation. We will share best practice to build and sustain a set of high quality, core support services, delivered across the county, that will sustain and strengthen Staffordshire's VCSE sector.

Aim 2: Evidence Based Planning & Development

Using our census information, member surveys, Staffordshire Observatory data, and collaborating with infrastructure partners, we will become more proactive in analysing trends and needs within the sector and local communities, in order to respond accordingly. This will inform our ongoing long-term business planning.

Aim 3: Ready for New Opportunities

Whilst building on the successful business we have and developing programmes based on local evidence; we must also be ready to take advantage of new and emerging opportunities that fit within our values and purpose.

Aim 4: Fit to Function

All of this is underpinned by the need for a fit for purpose, viable, functioning organisation.

This Strategic Plan will be lightly reviewed annually and more thoroughly reviewed before each Business Planning period commences.

It forms the basis of the Business Plan for 2022-2025