GLOUCESTERSHIRE VCSE ALLIANCE

Strategic Plan
2025 - 2030

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Big Vision

> A well-connected, resourceful, and innovative VCSE sector in Gloucestershire - one that drives positive social change, promotes health and wellbeing, and tackles inequalities through innovation, collaboration and community empowerment.

Executive Summary

As Gloucestershire VCSE Alliance comes to the end of its current strategy, the time is right for a review into what the next five years will look like to ensure we remain a relevant and valuable resource for Gloucestershire. Much has changed over the course of the past five years, and we can be extremely proud of what we have achieved in difficult circumstances. But as the sector develops, so should we.

Our strategy for 2025-2030 makes the case for building on existing strands of our delivery and growing our offer to position us as both a support to, and champion of, Gloucestershire's VCSE sector.

Our strategy is ambitious and bold, but we believe that we have positioned ourselves well, developed strong relationships, established a good reputation, and have a solid foundation from which to build.

Over the last year, Gloucestershire VCSE Alliance has conducted an engagement survey with our membership, a SWOT analysis within the staff team, and an employee engagement exercise. We have also conducted structured interviews with key stakeholders from the statutory sector.

All of these inputs support the case for change and have directly informed our strategic direction.

Changing Landscape and Case for Change

1. **There is a strong steer from our membership towards more practical support.**

Over the past five years, the VCSE sector's operating environment has changed significantly, leading to a shift in the type of support organisations need. Our member research evidences a growing demand for more practical support.

The average size of the majority of VCSE organisations operating in the county is still very small (under £20k income per year). To cater for these organisations and be true to our mission, we have found that additional services and a pivot from our strategic role should be offered.

While partnership development and supporting systems working remains core to our delivery, a large percentage of the VCSE sector is not being catered for within our existing remit.

Whilst many, (usually larger) organisations, are committed and willing to participate in our journey towards working better with the statutory sector, we are only catering for a small percentage of the VCSE sector.

There is also a growing demand for training, organisational development, advice, guidance, policy documentation, and back-office support within the infrastructure space.

Whilst there are undoubtedly pockets of excellent infrastructure support across the county, the absence of a countywide organisation providing coherent and consistent support means that provision can vary significantly by location and sub-sector.

By growing our delivery to meet this need, we hope to create a more equitable and joined-up offer that benefits the entire sector.

Changing Landscape and Case for Change

2. **There has been a steep rise in the number of Community Interest Companies (CICs) operating in the county and a need for them to have access to support that is specific to their structure.**

CICs make up a small, but rapidly growing section of the VCSE sector in Gloucestershire. They provide a dynamic and simple platform from which to build community-based assets, and at their best, provide an innovative, sustainable, and less bureaucratic not-for-profit model. We've seen through the Levelling Up Fund and other funding initiatives a growing appetite to fund and scale up CICs.

Gloucestershire VCSE Alliance should embrace this development and better support CICs and other social enterprise models to thrive, whilst supporting funders and commissioners to invest in these organisations securely and sustainably.

3. **There is a recurring trend for commissions to go out of county.**

Of the last 15 commissioned services in Gloucestershire, just four have been awarded to local VCSE organisations. This is not necessarily a bad thing for the quality of provision available, but does run counter to the narrative coming from commissioning teams about their desire for hyperlocal solutions/services.

Rather than challenging this trend, we need to better understand the 'why' and work with policymakers within the statutory sector to generate a shared agenda around localism.

We also need to encourage and support the sector to be ready for commissioning by organising itself to become a genuine alternative to nationals.
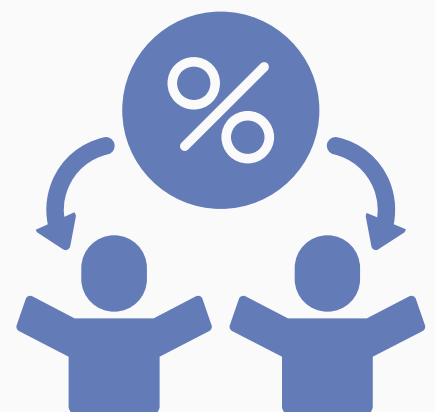
Changing Landscape and Case for Change

4. **There is a strong indication that a new Council for Voluntary Service (CVS)-type service is required.**

Through our membership survey, structured interviews and anecdotal evidence, the requirement for a CVS service to be re-established in Gloucestershire has emerged.

Although our strategic support is welcomed and required, there is an increased ask for more of the practical support traditionally offered within a CVS model.

We have tried and tested this type of provision over the last three years to great success, but now is the time to explicitly and intentionally move boldly into this space.

Diagram 1: Four functions of infrastructure

Leadership and Advocacy
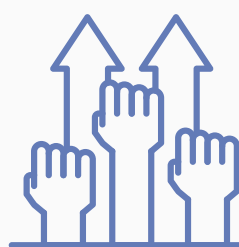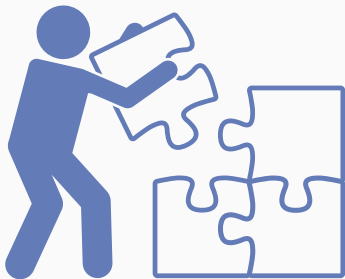
Capacity Building

Partnerships and Collaboration

Volunteering

Four New Strategic Aims

Advocate

Every day, the VCSE sector in Gloucestershire is making a positive difference for people and communities in the county. Our aim is to demonstrate the strength and breadth of our sector, and to champion its effectiveness as a tool for social change.

Build

We will build our infrastructure offer, so that charities, community groups and volunteers can focus on making a difference. We will also be reactive and agile in order to provide the sector with the tools they require to develop.

Connect

We're stronger as a sector when we come together. The sector, its workforce, and volunteers need a support system that can grow and sustain community action. Our aim is to convene, connect and evolve the sector into communities of practice that support each other and see value in our collective vision.

Develop

To remain relevant, the VCSE sector in Gloucestershire must evolve, adapt, and innovate. Part of our offer going forward needs to centre around providing leadership and radical ideas to support the sector to think differently about its vision, mission, and business model.

Vision, Mission and Values

Vision

A well-connected, resourceful, and innovative VCSE sector in Gloucestershire - one that drives positive social change, promotes health and wellbeing, and tackles inequalities through innovation, collaboration and community empowerment.

Mission

As the convenor of Gloucestershire's VCSE sector we amplify its collective voice to drive positive social change and to shape local and national strategy. We support our sector to deliver innovative and collaborative community-based services to ensure a healthier, happier, and more equitable future for Gloucestershire.

Our Values

All of our activities are underpinned by our values:

Integrity

Being transparent in our operations (open; sharing information); promoting a culture of accountability (staff, board, members, partners/stakeholders); being true to our mission and behaving with honesty and fairness; trusting and fostering trust.

Collaboration

Reaching out to the sector, partners and stakeholders; understanding the values, norms, and behaviours of others, and taking these into account when collaborating to create effective partnerships; being inclusive (championing diversity and ensuring that all voices within the community are heard, respected and valued, thus enriching the sector with a wide range of perspectives and experiences).

Innovation

Moving beyond the status quo; seeking new ways of doing things; taking risks; striving for better/more; having a can do attitude; failing fast, learning and reflecting.

Facilitation

Creating conditions ripe for change and improvement – internally and within our sector.

New Strategic Aims

By taking the mission, vision and values as well as the information gathered from our team survey/interviews, our membership survey and interviews with key stakeholders, Gloucestershire VCSE Alliance will centre its operations around the following four key strategic aims. Some of these reflect an enhanced model of our current delivery and some are a more radical departure from our current offering.

Our four strategic aims are:

Advocate

Every day, the VCSE sector in Gloucestershire is making a positive difference to people's lives. Our aim is to demonstrate the strength and breadth of our sector, and champion its effectiveness as a tool for positive social change. This strategic aim aligns with our core mission and reflects an enhancement of our current offering. We will:

- Generate timely and robust data on the VCSE sector in Gloucestershire to demonstrate its unique value within the prevention agenda. We will publish this information to enhance knowledge and understanding.
- Create a communication strategy that provides comment and analysis on national and local strategy, and its potential impact on the VCSE sector locally. This will support the sector to think strategically about wider determinants and plan accordingly.
- Provide data to both commissioners and funders about the operational environment of Gloucestershire's VCSE sector to support them in decision making, and to target funding based on evidence of need.

- Understand the pattern of 'why' commissioned services are being awarded to out-of-county organisations and demonstrate the impact of this. Work with the VCSE sector and commissioners to generate a value proposition that supports a 'local first' approach to Gloucestershire investment.
- Influence how the local VCSE sector is funded by supporting statutory sector colleagues to invest in VCSE sector services and infrastructure, and to adapt their commissioning processes to incorporate social value and localism.
- Develop models and support individuals representing the VCSE sector at a strategic level to provide direct connections between the statutory sector and an increasingly diverse cohort of VCSE organisations. This will include training and development of VCSE staff and volunteers to ensure they are confident and capable of fulfilling these roles.
- Encouraging and demonstrating a bottom-up, community-led approach to investment.

Build

Infrastructure exists to make life easier – so that charities, community groups and volunteers can focus on making a difference. Over the last five years our offer has been mainly strategic, whilst taking on some support tasks to cater for a clear need in the market. This has included learning and development programmes, which have proved popular with the sector and allowed us to cater for a wider range of VCSE organisations. The time feels right to establish the Gloucestershire VCSE Alliance as a development organisation.

It is also essential within this priority that Gloucestershire VCSE Alliance evolves alongside the sector in developing its own staff team, governance and culture in order to share learnings and foster a culture of collaborative development. We will:

- Provide project hosting for organisations that support our mission and align with our values. This will include start-up organisations, established organisations with new projects, as well as those wanting to make their services more streamlined and efficient.
- Provide practical support on the things that organisations rely on, such as funding, learning and development, recruiting and managing volunteers, leadership and management development, marketing and communications, Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks, and payroll support.
- Establish an in-house a culture of continuous improvement and practices that support our staff team to develop and grow within their role. This will include investment in training, developing excellent policies and procedures, and detailing career pathways with the staff team. It will also include a proactive effort to diversify our staff and volunteer teams.

- Create a robust and useful multi-agency induction programme for senior leaders across the system to support cross-sector understanding and build relationships.
- Continue to develop Go Volunteer Glos as an accessible and useful resource for the VCSE sector.
- Create a specific training offer for middle managers within the VCSE sector to support organisations to develop their talent and create a leadership pipeline. This is with a view to organisations becoming less reliant on external recruitment.
- Create connections across our membership and networks to facilitate learning, collaboration and the development of ideas.
- Create spaces to explore, discuss and change the complex challenges that we face as a sector.

Connect

We're stronger as a sector when we come together. The sector, its workforce and volunteers need a support system that can grow and sustain community action. Strong relationships and partnership working are at the core of what we do. We will:

- Create, manage, and sustain a 'VCSE Innovation Hub' - a central location for VCSE services and infrastructure that shares back-office resources, ideas, and knowledge, with physical connectivity. The hub will include conferencing and training facilities as part of its offering.
- Utilise existing and emerging communication platforms and technologies to collect and present information and issues relevant to the VCSE sector.
- Develop relationships and frameworks between the statutory and VCSE sectors to create a commissioning environment wherein local VCSE organisations are the preferred supplier for all relevant contracts.
- Foster a culture of connectedness and mutuality between charities and community groups of all sizes in the county.
- Continue to develop and promote a strong membership offer that demonstrates the value of working together and promotes the sector as a coherent and cohesive entity. This will include influencing investment, demonstrating a value proposition for partnership work, and supporting organisations to reduce the inefficiencies with the current VCSE sector model.
- Develop, evolve, and coordinate our model of 'Accountable Representation' to ensure expertise and independence is provided throughout the Integrated Care System (ICS). This requires robust governance processes to ensure fairness and independence and to provide statutory partners with confidence in our sector.

- Develop networks and task groups that support the VCSE sector to work together to take on the big strategic challenges that are important to our communities.

Develop

The VCSE sector needs to continually develop and evolve its offer and ways of working to remain relevant and deliver its services for the benefit of our communities. Gloucestershire VCSE Alliance has a significant role to play within this space and is well placed as a non-delivery organisation to facilitate difficult conversations and inspire new ways of working. We will:

- Take a hands-on approach to supporting the VCSE sector to become a more equal, diverse and inclusive sector at both operational, executive and board level.
- Encourage and generate difficult conversations about partnership development, and support VCSE sector organisations to end well, through winding-up or mergers.
- Continuously seek new ways of working and innovation within the sector. Bring best practice and innovation from other systems into Gloucestershire and develop our own ways of working that are nationally recognised.
- React to the operational environment and take on/deliver innovative new projects that support our mission and vision. Act as a project/fiscal host for new organisations and new work.
- Develop and deliver a robust and appealing Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)/social impact offer for businesses and VCSE organisations.
- Provide a tailored offer for CICs and other social enterprises through training, advice, and sector engagement.
- Support the sector to 'green up' its delivery through training, shared learning and best practice.

Conclusion

As we look ahead to the next five years, Gloucestershire VCSE Alliance will support the work and amplify the voices of local VCSE sector organisations through a period of significant change in the county. By focusing on practical support, fostering stronger partnerships, and promoting innovation, we will work to ensure that the sector continues to thrive and evolve in response to the changing needs of our communities.

Our strategic aims of **Advocate, Build, Connect,** and **Develop** will enable us to meet these challenges head-on, creating a more resilient and capable VCSE sector that is equipped to drive meaningful social change.

Together, we will enhance the sector's ability to serve the people of Gloucestershire, tackle inequalities, and build a future where opportunity, health and wellbeing are accessible to all.

Matt Lennard
Chief Executive Officer
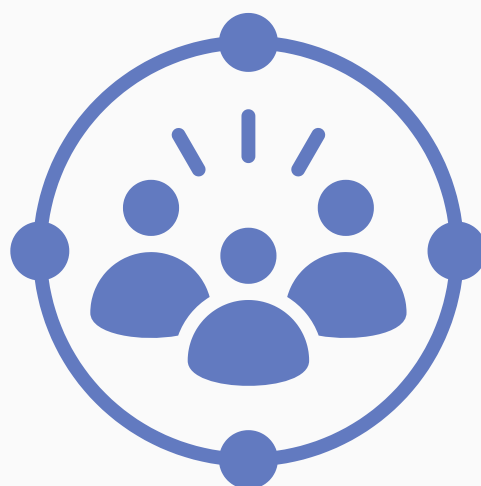
Please note: in 2025 we changed our name from Gloucestershire VCS Alliance to Gloucestershire VCSE Alliance. We're currently rebranding and you may find references to Gloucestershire VCS Alliance in our communications.

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