



**COG**  
**CHIEF OFFICER'S GROUP**  
**TELFORD & WREKIN**  
TOGETHER  
MAKING A DIFFERENCE  
CHANGING LIVES



# How to Work with the VCSE Sector in Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin



# What we do

- Act as a relevant point of contact for system commissioners and public sector bodies for the purpose of developing policy and influencing strategic planning and service development
- Act as a point of contact and a way of bringing the VCSE sector in Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin together
- Create opportunities to collaborate, develop partnerships, avoid duplication and maximise efficiency for the benefit of clients, their families and the wider community
- Develop a consensus on issues of mutual interest and agree joint actions and shared plans to promote the services available from or to protect the interests of local voluntary sector providers
- Gain a common understanding of the environment and context within which operations are taking place and support each other in delivering services
- Provide a peer support network for VCSE sector organisations in which to exchange information and voice issues or concerns



# Work with us because

## Single point of contact means:

- Ease of engagement with a wide reach into the voluntary and community sector
- Fair process, which is transparent, encouraging and supporting our collaborative approaches
- Assurance that you reach the right organisations in the right place
- Trust fosters more joined-up working that benefits individuals and communities





## Our Story



The Shropshire Voluntary and Community Sector 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 Chief Officers Group (COG) of the Telford & Wrekin voluntary, community and social enterprise sector (VCSE) has been around for over 10 years and has provided an excellent point of contact and coordination for many of the organisations, large and small, working in the area



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# How we work:

Roots in groups and communities of all kinds: eg older people, young people, ethnically and culturally diverse communities, housing, mental health, LGBT+ and more

VCSA and COG  
Member  
Organisations and  
Their Networks

VCSA and COG  
Partnerships and  
Forums of Interest

VCSA and COG



## Infrastructure Support: Telford Alliance

The Chief Officers Group in Telford and Wrekin held an event on 1st October 2019 which was attended by representatives from Lloyds Bank Foundation. This established interest for LBF to support the COG and wider sector in Telford as one of their 6 pilot areas. Working with LBF started during 2020 looking at Organisational Resilience, People and Communities and Businesses and charities working, casual mapping and support for developing an Impact Assessment Tool for the sector.

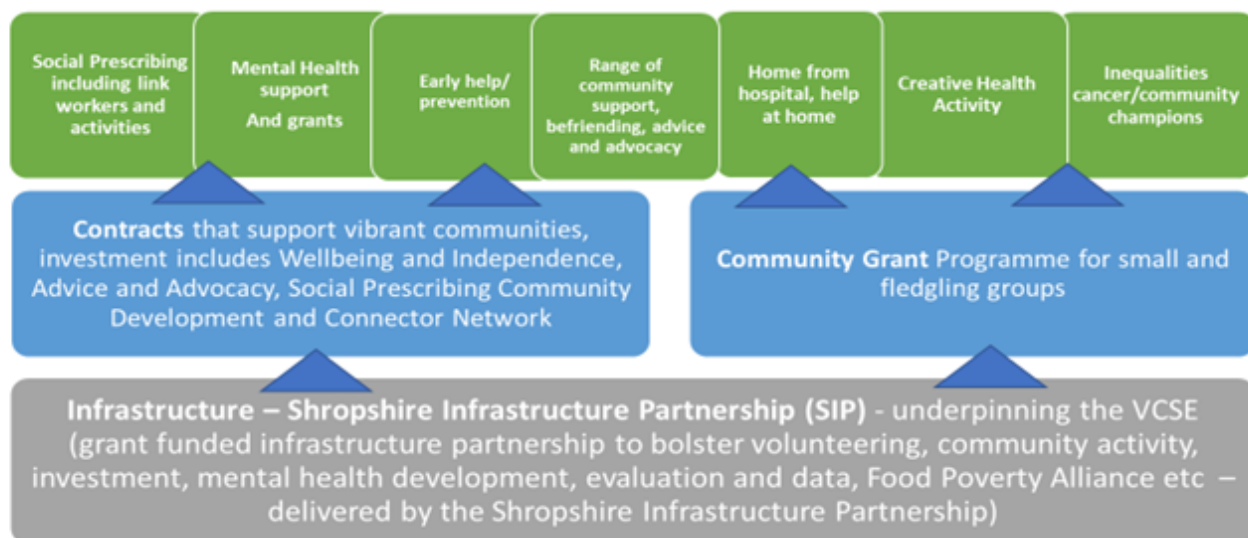
In March 2021, a dedicated person from LBF was introduced to support Telford VCSE and small business to further look at resilience and opportunities for Charities and Business working together

In addition to the infrastructure and reliance work above LBF have provided a resource to further their People and Communities, this has led to the formation of an Alliance with the shared vision of early intervention into Unlocking Potential in Telford and Wrekin

This approach provides infrastructure support for discussions, workshops and collaborative approaches across sectors, working together as one entity to build on what there is already in Telford and establish new connections and ways of working, providing systems and services that are shaped and designed by those that benefit or are affected by them.



### Community investment and activity



## Infrastructure Support: Shropshire Infrastructure Partnership

The Shropshire Infrastructure Partnership (SIP) is a forum of interest under the VCSA. Voluntary sector infrastructure support describes all aspects of help given to voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations (VCSE) to enable them to run effectively, legally, safely and sustainably.

SIP is a consortium of organisations who collaborate and work together, offering expert help to develop community groups, promote sustainable voluntary action and build a stronger Shropshire to improve the lives of local people.

The aims and objectives of the Shropshire Infrastructure Partnership are:

- To improve the health, wellbeing and community life for the people of Shropshire, including building resilience and reducing loneliness and isolation.
- To provide support to encourage and sustain community-led action and strong local governance.
- To promote greater collaboration between voluntary organisations and community groups and the public sectors, particularly the local authorities and health, connecting public sector outcomes with local provision.
- To create a vehicle through which the public sector can contract/commission the wider VCS.
- To support VCS organisations to develop services which meet local need, but also align with Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin strategic intentions

SIP provides:

- Bespoke infrastructure support, funding advice, and volunteer brokerage to VCS organisations
- Community Development as part of Shropshire Social Prescribing model
- A VCS Mental Health support project
- Grant giving
- Support for Shropshire's Food Poverty Alliance
- Specialist infrastructure support for youth and physical activity



## Joined up working stops people going into crisis

A few years ago, "C", 38, had a breakdown and attempted suicide following his double diagnosis of ASD/ADHD and the abuse and stigmatisation he endured from his family of origin. He grew up with his single-parent Mum who was alcohol-addicted and used to accuse him of things he hadn't done. When he joined us he was wary of other people and being misunderstood or patronised.

Qube referred C to Open Harmony. They'd already arranged his volunteering at the Community Orchard in Oswestry. Later, he joined art, design and singing activities at Designs in Mind and the Men's Walking & Talking group

C said this safe space, plus a focus like learning guitar (playing a right-handed guitar when he's left-handed no less), has stopped thoughts of self-harm and suicide. C's progress is like night and day. He is a very supportive and empathic member of the group, always encouraging others. He's already inspiring others by teaching them guitar, spreading the joy of music. He's recently volunteered for the Steering Committee Chair role, which is fantastic news for Open Harmony as C absolutely gets the power of music and an empowered community, and he wants to help that grow, and help "even just one more person put the knife down and pick the guitar up."





## Sector responds quickly and effectively to crises

At the start of the Pandemic, SYA's CEO Richard Parkes agreed to be the strategic link for the VCSA to the statutory sector. In early meetings they had to design a process "At speed" to recruit, check, risk assess, place and support the volunteers who would support the testing and vaccination roll out in Telford & Shropshire. Members of the strategic planning group wanted this to be electronic, as automated as possible and to create a data base that multiple agencies and staff could use at the same time.

During one lengthy zoom meeting with the strategic partners Richard called upon "J", a young SYA volunteer who has exceptional IT skills and asked if what they were thinking was even possible? In J's usual style he said leave it with me and I'll check. An hour later, with the strategic meeting still underway, J had created a first draft using Microsoft forms, which populated a spreadsheet in SharePoint that Richard was able to share with the group.

Over the next few weeks, it was amended, tweaked and altered by J who worked with SYA and RCC (now Community Resource) staff to perfect what became the biggest and most complex spreadsheet Richard had ever worked on.

Had it not been for J's dedication and volunteering the launch of the volunteering offer to find, recruit and train vaccination & testing centre volunteers would have been delayed. This simple act likely saved lives by getting more people vaccinated more quickly and helped recruit over 1,200 volunteers safely.

J is now a trustee of SYA, he continues to volunteer with them and in Scouting.



# Principles for working together

- Invest in the sector as key partners, especially around prevention and living well
- Co-produce with us and our people with lived experiences
- Encourage and support collaboration, not competition
- Make best use of our existing structures (i.e. COG and VCSA), rather than creating new ones
- Engage with the whole VCSE fairly, with transparency
- Be responsive to community needs based, with the understanding that communities can be of interest or place-based and come in all sizes
- Act as a conduit for communities, including identifying those whose voices we don't normally hear or those communities most often excluded
- Make best use of our data to inform intelligent decision-making and influence commissioning priorities
- Ensure that decision-making happens as locally as possible and respects the governance arrangements within individual organisations
- Tackling inequalities by empowering our communities – we want to do more than listen to our communities and patients – we want to ensure that our whole system is designed and governed to support changes and improvements that are important to them