# The Shropshire Accord

An agreement of joint working principles between local public sector bodies and Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) groups and organisations in Shropshire

## DRAFT

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# Introduction

The Shropshire Accord is a voluntary agreement between local public sector bodies and Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) groups and organisations. It sets out shared values, principles, and commitments to better work together to serve local people and Shropshire's communities. The Accord includes statements of commitment and agreed behaviours, and is more than just a document; it establishes a way of working that acknowledges the necessity of equitable partnerships. All parties and stakeholders will start on equal footing, recognising that fairness and inclusivity are vital in fostering successful collaboration in commissioning and service delivery for the benefit of local communities.

The Accord is needed to ensure clear processes and closer working relationships, to integrate the principles of social value into policies and commissioning, and to make the best use of public money to deliver quality services for local people. It also addresses themes such as independence, working with volunteers, equality and diversity, impact and social value, information sharing, emerging needs, place-based working, community buildings and assets, and system working.

Previously known as the 'Shropshire Compact', which initially was part of national policy in 2017. There has been cross-sector agreement that it was a useful tool for establishing clear processes and closer working relationships but needed updating and revisiting. The following document has been produced to consider the change in working relationships, the national and local situation and looking to an evolving future.

The document has been co-created by Shropshire Council and the VCSA, with consultation with the wider voluntary sector and other public sector bodies. The Accord should be referenced in any contract between two signatories and is highly recommended to be included in any contract between the public and VCS sector. At the end of the document are suggested ways of using the terms set out in action.

The Accord will recognise and endorse that the VCSE requires robust and dedicated infrastructure to enable working effectively and efficiently for the whole of the VCS sector regardless of the size of organisations. Currently, the Shropshire Infrastructure Partnership (SIP), provides a comprehensive suite of programmes of support and guidance. SIP is a collaborative partnership between Community Resource, Qube, SYA and Energize.

# 1. Independence (and political neutrality)

## We will all:

- Consider other organisations' positions and the constraints and pressures they face.
- Always act in the best interests of the public, rather than to a political aim.
- Where possible, be guided by independent and impartial bodies, guidance and agreements and Memorandums of Understanding (MOU).
- Seek to use mutually agreed and created guidance and where additional guidance is needed working in partnership to create it.

## Public sector officers and commissioners will:

- Value and respect the independence of VCS groups and organisations, in voice, purpose and action.
- Respect and engage with VCS leaders including boards of trustees and other independent voices.
- Recognise the need to avoid in-balances of power caused by size, financial power, brand and knowledge.
- Recognise that the VCS is not a delivery arm of the state and that small, community-based groups and organisation have a social value beyond scale or influence.
- Accept the right of voluntary sector groups and organisation to campaign, regardless of any financial relationships with Shropshire's Public Sector bodies.
- Accept challenge and feedback from the VCS in their work to represent members of the public and those using the services and support they offer.

## VCS groups and organisations will:

- Understand that while statutory employees may be working under and affected by political pressures, they themselves serve the same public as the VCS.
- Promote independence whilst accepting that the support of the state and political bodies is essential in working to best serve local communities.
- Work together to highlight threats to independence, whether linked to policy or commissioning practice, and seek to overcome any lack of recognition of independence and its value.
- Join with other VCS groups and organisations to maintain a voice for the sector, using Shropshire VCS Assembly and other local networks and support.

# 2. Working with volunteers

## We will all:

- Make use of Shropshire Infrastructure Partnership (SIP) good practice guidelines and support in work to draw up contracts and recruit volunteers.
- Commit to boosting the role of volunteers and uptake of volunteering Shropshire, recognising the impact of volunteers in addressing community needs.
- Endeavour to support volunteers with training, funding, support, benefits and upskilling, wherever possible.
- Ensure that volunteering is mutually beneficial for both the volunteer and the volunteer manager/co-ordinator/organisation.
- Recognise volunteers as professionals, that come with a cost, even if individuals are giving their time for free. Whilst also being mindful they are doing so free of charge, sometimes with less security and support than some employees.
- Adopt equal opportunities for volunteering, safeguarding, health and safety.

## Public sector officers and commissioners will:

- Build in guidance and scope if including volunteering requirements within contracts.
- Be mindful that VCS organisations may have a shortage in volunteers and work together to understand the challenges that can be faced within volunteer recruitment and retention.

## VCS groups and organisations will:

- Will continue to value the contributions of volunteers, working in partnership with others to seek wider public recognition of achievements where appropriate.
- Offer choice to volunteers and take the time to review roles and the levels of satisfaction that volunteering should provide.
- Recognise the different pressures faced by volunteers and support volunteers who find themselves facing challenges that cannot be responded to alone and require group or organisational support.
- Where possible measure volunteer hours to enable the communication of the economic and social value of volunteering.

# 3. Equality and diversity

## We will all:

- Commit to EDI (Equality, Diversity and Inclusion) with each new project, commission, working group or partnership.
- Understand the demographic make-up of the county and VCS and commit to encouraging a more diverse landscape.
- Ensure voice and representation from diverse communities on issues relevant to them (see engagement).
- Work across sectors to provide the best possible support and inclusion for marginalised communities.

# 4.  Impact and Social Value

## We will all:

- Consider the social impact of policies, programmes and services to ensure change does not disproportionately affect the most vulnerable.
- Agree how outcomes will be measured and monitored before a contract or funding agreement is made.
- Take into account different perspectives of impact due to the differing nature of the work and ways of internal measurement.
- Develop funding and contract opportunities at an appropriate size and scale to maximise the delivery of social value.
- Work together to make the best use of public money to deliver quality services for local people.
- Promote the breadth of social, economic and environmental value: fundraising, sustainability, volunteering, mentoring, donations in kind etc.

## Public sector officers and commissioners will:

- Work to integrate the principles of social value into policies and commissioning and procurement practice.
- Ensure strategic outcomes are clear and incorporated in the design of contracts and joint service delivery.
- Use the VCS Assembly when working with the voluntary sector to enable joint working and the collective reporting of social value.

## VCS groups and organisations will:

- Be mindful of the importance of measuring and promoting social value, from a group, organisation and sector perspective.

# 5. Information Sharing

## We will all:

- Work to make information available to partner groups and organisations in order to best meet the needs of our local communities.
- Comply with good practice and information governance, working to the General Data Protection Regulation and using information sharing agreements and other tools to support partnership working.
- Respect people's right to privacy and openly communicate how we handle data in the design and delivery of our services and support.
- Ensure both qualitative and quantitative data is used effectively, recognising that people's comments and stories are very valuable in addition to core datasets.

## Public sector officers and commissioners will:

- Recognise that the VCS is a diverse sector and that data collection practice will vary for each group or organisation.
- Understand that data collection and reporting incurs a cost to any group or organisation.
- Only make requests for data from the VCS when the purpose of the data collection is confirmed and the ways the data will be used for maximum value are agreed.
- Clearly set out any data collection and reporting requirements linked to grant funding or contracts.
- Respond positively to data requests from individual VCS groups, organisations or local VCS partnerships.

## VCS groups and organisations will:

- Support the data collection needs of public sector partners where possible, understanding that cross-sector datasets can be more valuable than single sector data collection and reporting.
- Recognise that the data gathered by VCS groups and organisations is often an early indicator of the issues that later impact the public sector. VCS data may help to indicate emerging community needs before statutory services experience changing demand.
- Explore options for working in partnership within the sector, where possible, to streamline data collection methods and adopt similar tools where there are identified local benefits.
- Seek to communicate the value of volunteer time, calculating the equivalent financial value where possible to inform social value calculations.

# 6.  Emerging needs

## We will all:

- Work to engage local people and those accessing support in work to communicate and evidence emerging needs, recognising the value of user-led groups and representatives with experience of local services.
- Understand the importance of sharing emerging community needs and trends (either anecdotal or evidence based) recognising how important horizon scanning and service planning are, particularly when resources are limited.
- Work together to recognise when existing provision does not meet emerging needs and make use of strong local partnerships to explore ways forward.
- Communicate knowledge of emerging needs through our published plans and documents.
- Commit to co-production and co-design, to create effective, equitable, inclusive, and sustainable services. Following best practice (see resources) to include this from the beginning and prioritise service users.

## Public sector officers and commissioners will:

- Value the role the voluntary and community sector has in the early identification of community needs and emerging trends (and the ability to adapt and flex to respond to those needs).
- Recognise that the voluntary and community sector includes organisations able to carry out research and engagement on their behalf.
- Publish need data within key documents such as needs assessments, market position statements, strategic plans etc.

## VCS groups and organisations will:

- Communicate service and support offers so partners understand the support available to respond to emerging needs.
- Work in partnership and with the public sector to draw on available tools and resources to best identify and report emerging needs.
- Draw on the funding and support options available to VCS groups and organisations to trial new approaches to meeting need and foster innovation.

# 7. Place-based working

## We will all:

- Seek to meet the needs of Shropshire's communities through place-based working where tailored local level support is required and the most effective way to deliver support.
- Be willing to assess and explore co-location of support activities where this best meets the needs of local people.
- Work closely with our local partners including town and parish councils, working closely with Shropshire Association of Local Councils (SALC).

## Public sector officers and commissioners will:

- Seek to enable area-based representation where most appropriate , but remaining mindful that sometimes communities are dispersed and representation can be delivered by organisations or community representatives who may not be from a local area but support it.
- Work to understand all VCS groups and organisations based in a local community (or a dispersed community, well connected across the county) and work to openly engage and invite wider participation, avoiding a focus on only existing contacts.
- Recognise the diverse geographical scope of local VCS groups and organisations, understanding that organisations covering a wider geography may find engaging in multiple place-based projects a challenge and significant draw on resources.
- Acknowledge diversity of local VCS groups and organisations in different communities across Shropshire, valuing difference and working with the unique local structures and networks already in place.

## VCS groups and organisations will:

- Understand the resource limitations of public sector partners, which may sometimes limit opportunities for place-based engagement and delivery.
- Communicate openly any concerns about place-based working, supporting public sector organisations to understand Shropshire's communities and their unique characteristics.

# 8. Community Buildings and Assets

## We will all:

- Work together to make the best use of public sector owned premises and land for the benefit of Shropshire's communities.
- Recognise and work together to make best use of buildings and facilities owned by charities and the third sector.

## Public sector officers and commissioners will:

- Offer robust processes to allow community ownership of buildings and land, including Community Right to Buy and Community Asset Transfer.
- Share expertise and knowledge with the local community when transferring buildings and land into community ownership, recognising that not all voluntary and community groups and organisations will have prior experience of these processes.
- Understand that VCS groups and organisations should not be expected to bear the costs of any assets in a state of poor repair and the management/transfer of any risk should be fair and reasonable. Careful consideration is required to avoid burdens being placed on VCS groups and volunteers in a way that will potentially threaten their sustainability and ability to manage an asset over the longer term.
- Enable public sector buildings to be used by communities and the VCS for the delivery of local services and activities at an affordable or no cost. Any rental costs will take into account the sustainability of the service, social and added value.
- When looking for premises in localities the public sector will consider using VCS space in that area as an option. By sharing facilities we improve the sustainability and viability of community facilities whoever owns them.

## VCS groups and organisations will:

- Recognise when it is no longer viable for buildings and land to remain under the ownership/management of local public sector bodies, being sympathetic to financial challenges and the need to prioritise resources.
- Support public sector organisations in sharing information about opportunities for communities to take ownership/management of community assets, where appropriate, participating in discussions exploring local ownership options and ideas.

# 9. System working, signposting and referrals

## We will all:

- Make use of local tools and directories to promote and communicate service and support offers.
- Make our contacts count, working together to try to reduce the number of steps individuals and families need to take to find the right support.
- Recognise the demands placed upon other services; using careful and well-informed referral and signposting to reducing pressure on other local groups and organisations.
- Ensure we are well informed of eligibility and access to reduce poor signposting and inappropriate referral.

## Public sector officers and commissioners will:

- Accept a key role in system design and delivery, including the establishment of local partnerships to establish effective referral pathways.
- Recognise that whilst VCS groups and organisations play an important role in prevention and early intervention, access to volunteers, paid staff and funding may not always be available to enable a response to increased demand.
- Work with VCS groups and organisations in advance of any new referral and signposting practice.

## VCS groups and organisations will:

- Work together to support each other in the delivery of effective local signposting and referral practices.
- Communicate service pressures locally when demand exceeds capacity or when service changes are implemented.

# 10. Commissioning and Grant Funding

## We will all:

- Make the best use of public money to deliver the best support possible for local communities.
- Recognise the value of partnership service delivery models in strengthening local delivery and access to services.
- Work together creatively to encourage innovation and explore new opportunities.
- Contribute towards community impact assessments to support sustainable solution commissioning based on community needs.
- Establish positive communications to ensure healthy relationships.
- Refer to the VCSA/COG Prospectus.

## Public sector officers and commissioners will:

- Ensure strategic outcomes are clear and well communicated to partner groups and organisations.
- Coproduce commissioning opportunities with communities to ensure they reflect needs and take locality and community profiles into consideration.
- Communicate commissioning and service delivery opportunities widely to ensure fair opportunity to all providers of services and support.
- Deliver well managed and effective tendering and commissioning processes that show due consideration to the impact on the marketplace and offer realistic parameters and expectations.
- Seek feedback on tendering processes and commissioning activity to encouraging ongoing learning and improvement.
- Ensure time frames for funding and contracts reflect the time it will take to deliver the agreed outcomes.
- Ensure year on year cost increases are considering and embedded within commissioning arrangements/agreements based on realistic projections.
- Understand risk, ensuring that contract terms are proportionate to the nature and value of the contract and outcome.
- Plan well to reduce the risk of uncertainty for commissioned or grant funded providers.
- Ensure commissioning opportunities include exit planning expectations to ensure that all parties are protected and impact on service offers/availability is limited.
- Recognise the need for prompt payment and that some VCS groups and organisations cannot accept payment in arrears.
- Provide robust and clear cost analysis that is reflective of and responsive to contract opportunities / commissions.
- Provide clear and well structured contract monitoring processes with a key contact identified to offer support and guidance throughput the contract period.

- Identify and communicate risk before and throughout the commissioning process.
- Maximise the value of commissioning information to support future decision making.
- Share best practice in commissioning.
- Recognise the role of commissioners in market development.

## VCS groups and organisations will:

- Recognise that limited public sector resources may lead to reduced or more competitive allocation of contracts and grant funding.
- Constructively feedback on commissioning experiences to support public sector learning and improvement.
- Seek to comply with commissioning requirements, providing full and robust responses to requests for information, policies, procedures and other required documentation.
- Provide clear and timely information within reasonable expectations for the size of commission and organisational resources.
- Aim to meet agreed commissioning and grant funding timescales.
- Participate meaningfully with appropriate contract monitoring.
- Identify and communicate risk before and throughout the commissioning process.
- Adopt robust governance arrangements.
- Demonstrate the delivery of quality, making appropriate use of quality standards and other tools to evidence outcomes.
- Provide robust and clear cost analysis that is reflective of and responsive to contract opportunities / commissions.
- Work with commissioners to overcome unanticipated challenges such as contract extensions or delays in local budget decisions.
- Demonstrate developments of offers based on community insight and engagement to show a real time understanding of community needs and marketplace requirements.

# 11. Decommissioning well

## We will all:

- Recognise that public sector budget challenges may lead to a growth in decommissioning practices.
- All partners will work with recipients of services to limit the impact of decommissioning where appropriate.
- Minimise negative impacts on service users, patients and communities through engagement, decision making and good planning. Work collaboratively to identify where decommissioning is appropriate and manage this in the least detrimental way.
- Adopt good practice in assessing risk and the impact of service changes, particularly for those people with protected characteristics or where inequality may emerge.
- Work together to engage service users effectively, especially when services will be reduced or lost.
- Ensure community-based intelligence and engagement informs co-produced decision making. Avoid decisions being made in isolation, understanding that our sectors combine to form a wider system of support for local people.
- Recognise the role of good communication when decommissioning is likely.
- Participate in impact analysis and provide data, where possible, to effectively and meaningfully assess impact.
- Take consideration of reputational impact and be mindful of maintaining stability of relationships (both partnerships & community based) to protect all parties interests as best as possible.

## Public sector officers and commissioners will:

- Communicate the context of difficult decisions and budgetary challenges, ensuring these are developed collaboratively.
- Share available evidence to support decision making.
- Provide no less than 6 months' notice when funding or contracts are subject to change and provide a clear rationale for why decisions have been made. Where this is not possible, develop an appropriate timescale collaboratively with partners.
- Avoid delays in making difficult decisions and decommissioning by starting a dialogue as early as possible to minimise impact and allow time for contingency planning and options appraisal.
- Deliver good practice standards in consultation where stakeholder and public consultations are required.

## VCS groups and organisations will:

- Communicate concerns and impacts so they are understood by the commissioners.
- Focus on the needs of people using services to minimise impact and avoid people being put at risk.
- Proactively explore any other options such as external funding opportunities.
- Should decommissioning conversations result from non-compliance concerns, engage proactively to try to resolve any issues.

# 12. Capacity building and VCS infrastructure

## We will all:

- Promote the importance of different forms of VCS infrastructure support such as start up and closure support, trustee training and governance, volunteering brokerage and support, training and skills, representation and research, funding and income generation, back-office support and buildings and assets.
- Endorse and evidence the impact of VCSE infrastructure delivered by Shropshire Infrastructure Partnership (SIP) and others where applicable.
- Work with and support SIP to promote the role of independent VCS infrastructure support.
- Value the opportunities for innovation, testing new ideas and ways of working.
- See to work in partnerships where this enables capacity building and improved resourcing.

## Public sector officers and commissioners will:

- Commit to capacity building when beginning a new project involving VCS.
- Review areas for improvement and work with the voluntary sector to find ways of addressing them.

## VCS groups and organisations will:

- Provide feedback for VCS infrastructure providers to help them to develop the services on offer and plan for the future.
- Highlight areas for improvement and make the business case for funding and infrastructure.
- When highlighting the need for infrastructure and core funding, recognise the constraints the public sector may be under.

# 13. Partnership and representation

## We will all:

- Agree that working in partnership, in many forms, is better for Shropshire's communities than working in isolation.
- Work with the VCS Assembly as the main representative body of the VCS, using VCS Assembly procedures for securing representation. This is for transparency, to ensure that the representative can feedback to the rest of the VCS Assembly membership and wider sector.
- Present ideas to the VCS Assembly (VCSA) Board and forums of interest for feedback and to facilitate cross sector working and engagement.
- Respect representatives and their expertise. Representation should be tangible and authentic, with power, a voice and rights for all representatives.
- Ensure representatives from different sectors are treated equality and power imbalances are avoided.
- Support collaboration across and within sectors.
- Work to remove barriers to participation and be conscious of the different terms and language we use, adding explanation in order to build understanding.
- Recognise diversity within the VCS and use and promote partnership structures.
- Acknowledge that misunderstandings can occur and use the dispute resolution procedure for the Shropshire Accord when necessary.

## Public sector officers and commissioners will:

- Recognise the different strengths and experiences of partners and service providers. Share skills and offer guidance where needed.
- Work in appropriate partnership arrangements throughout the design and delivery of policies, programmes and services.
- Make use of appropriate resources such as terms of reference, role descriptions and project plans to ensure expectations for each project or partnership group are clear.
- Share information about new policies and programmes, particularly when driven by government and other national bodies, recognising that VCS groups and organisation may not have access to the same information resources.

## VCS groups and organisations will:

- Recognise that public sector groups and organisations do not always have the resources to work with VCS groups and organisations separately and often rely on forums and networks as a means of speaking to many.
- Respond to requests from public sector partners to engage in conversations designed to best support the people of Shropshire, our environment and wider communities.

# 14. Communication and engagement

## We will all:

- Follow good practice in representation.
- Use clear, concise and plain language.
- Provide feedback mechanisms to ensure improvement in delivery.
- Work together to remove barriers to engagement and involvement including working with target audiences to design engagement opportunities.
- Provide clear feedback to explain how respondents have influenced the design and development of policies, programmes and services.
- Include explanations where respondents' views are not acted on. Actively seek the views of service users to assess impact before making decisions
- Work to promote understanding of the specific needs and issues of the underrepresented, vulnerable or disadvantaged.
- Use the VCS Assembly newsletter to communicate with the voluntary sector such as providing Shropshire Accord updates.
- Bring information to each other in an effective way, avoiding announcing information at short notice when changes will affect decision making or services.
- Clear communications plans/strategies when working on shared projects.
- Understand the specific communications/engagement make up of Shropshire and work together to deliver important messages and engage with the public.

## Public sector officers and commissioners will:

- Value the relationships the VCS has in communities and use them to make engagement more effective.
- Support the VCS where possible through communication and engagement opportunities.
- Assess the impact of new policies and legislation on the VCS and reduce bureaucratic burdens on organisations.
- Work with VCS groups and organisations from the earliest stage of commissioning to design policies, programmes and services.
- Conduct 8 to 12 week formal consultations, where appropriate. When this is not possible, provider clear explanations and rationale for shorter time frames.

## VCS groups and organisations will:

- Be flexible where possible, recognising that the public sector cannot always provide longer timescales for consultation.
- Recognise the different strengths and experiences of partners and service providers. Share skills and offer guidance where needed.
- Try to participate, where time and resources allow, to promote good communication and engagement across Shropshire.

# Accord in Action

The Shropshire Accord should be referenced in various scenarios where public and voluntary sector collaboration is necessary. This includes:

- **Contracts**: The Accord should be referenced in all contracts between the public sector and VCS organisations, ensuring its values and principles are upheld.
- **Commissioning Frameworks**: The Accord can guide decision-making processes in commissioning frameworks, ensuring the alignment of all parties with its equity and collaboration principles.
- **Partnership Agreements**: In instances of partnership working, joint ventures, or any formal agreements, the Accord serves as a benchmark for equitable cooperation.

**Breaches Process**: Should a breach of the Accord's values or commitments occur the following steps must be taken:

1. **Notification**: The concerned party must notify the relevant stakeholders and the VCSA coordinator or public sector lead.
2. **Mediation**: If necessary, an independent mediator may be appointed to help resolve the issue.
3. **Public Statement**: In cases where the breach has a significant impact on services or public trust, a public statement can be considered for issue by the concerned organisations (explaining the nature of the breach and the steps being taken to resolve it).
4. **Documentation**: All breaches and resolutions should be documented and reported during the regular review process of the Accord.

The Accord is a living document, and as such, it will be reviewed regularly (at least annually during the AGM) to ensure it remains relevant and effective.

## Accord compliance and dispute resolution

The Shropshire Accord provides shared values and agreed ways of working between the voluntary and community sector and public sector partners. It is based on strong local partnerships and good relationships but occasionally there may be concerns and the principles of the Accord may not always be applied. The aim will be to resolve any problems or disagreements that arise quickly and fairly. Sometimes an informal discussion may be all that is necessary, describing concerns and suggesting ways of resolving them. In signing up to the Shropshire Accord, public sector organisations and voluntary and community sector groups and organisations commit to working to constructively address any problems and accept the recommendations made by those seeking to implement the resolution process.

The Accord Disputes process does not cover formal complaints or disputes about contracts, contract breaches or legal aspects of tendering processes. Formal challenges must be made to the relevant organisation using the processes available (often complaints processes may be appropriate). The Accord disputes and resolution process is informal in nature.

Should a concern arise the process is to:

1) Raise the concern with:
   a. The coordinator of the Shropshire VCS Assembly if you are a voluntary or community sector group or organisation: email vcsassembly@shropshire.gov.uk.
   b. The nominated Accord lead in your organisation. If you are working within a public sector organisation this will usually be a strategic commissioning officer (please refer to the Shropshire Accord signatories section).

2) Permission to take the issue forward will be requested. If no permission is received, it may be possible to raise issues anonymously as learning. This will be discussed with the group or organisation raising concerns.

3) If permission to act is granted then the coordinator of the VCS Assembly, Public Sector Commissioning Lead or an appropriate independent person from either sector (VCS or public), will be appointed to help mediate a solution. The appointed lead will be provided with clear guidance on the role of mediator.

4) A solution may be found without the need for a mediation meeting. If a meeting is needed, this will be organised, and the appropriate attendees identified. A suitable independent chairperson will be appointed. The parties in dispute will be asked to outline their concerns in a written document in advance. Terms of reference and an agenda will be shared to communicate expectations in advance of attendance.

5) If the resolution meeting is not successful, options to raise the matter through a formal route will be discussed, this may include a complaints process or contract dispute process.

6) The outcome of the process will be recorded and shared with all parties. If a Shropshire Accord breach has occurred this will be identified and communicated to a senior leader within the public sector organisation or VCS group or organisation responsible for the breach.

7) In the unlikely event that a public sector organisation signed up to the Accord consistently fails to respect the agreed ways of working and delivers changes in a way that detrimentally impacts the voluntary sector, the VCS Assembly may choose to highlight concerns publicly through an open letter or other avenue. This action will only be undertaken after all other options and opportunities have been exhausted.

## How we can use the Accord

- The Accord can be referred to in partnership groups terms of reference, commissioning and contract resources, joint service delivery agreements and many other forms of partnership working document. The benefit of using references to the Accord is as a reminder of the commitments we make, across sectors, to work effectively together.
- Over time there are plans to produce some Shropshire Accord Toolkits. These will be practical examples of how the Accord can be used and they will be based on key topic areas and/or on the experiences of signatories. Examples may include conflict resolution, VCS representation, commissioning and co-creation. These will also link to useful external resources where necessary.

## How we will promote the Accord

- Sign up process: VCSA members will all be contacted asking them to sign up, and built into the membership sign up. Public sector will be engaged through a series of workshops and meetings arranged by the Accord working group.
- Regular review at the VCS Annual Assembly and Board meetings where necessary.
- Branding, through a Shropshire Accord recognised logo.
- Simplification through a supporting summary of the Shropshire Accord linked to the fill document and an easy read version. This will be held on the VCS Assembly website.
- Accord champions and leads (for example the VCS Forums of Interest will be asked to promote the Accord through the work they undertake, recognising that cross sector engagement).
- Communications updates will be built into the VCS Assembly bulletin, regular updates to VCS Assembly Board and other communication methods used by the VCS Assembly and public sector partners.

# Glossary

**Accord**: An accord is an official agreement or treaty but in the context of the Shropshire Accord we use the term to mean an agreement of the shared values and principles we will adopt when working together across the voluntary and community sector and public sector. This is not a legal or formally binding document but an informal agreement of the accepted and good practice ways of working together.

**Accord breach**: In the context of the Shropshire Accord a breach is defined as failure to work in line with the shared values, principles and ways of working set out within the document. A breach has no legal status.

**Accord compliance**: Working in line with the good practice ways of working and principles set out within the Shropshire Accord document.

**Advocacy**: Representing or speaking on behalf of individuals to protect their rights and interests

**AGM**: Annual General Meeting (a mandatory annual gathering of an organisation's trustees/committee members/volunteers/directors/shareholders/secretary and other interested stakeholders).

**Assembly**: A group of people coming together for a common purpose.

**Capacity Building**: Enhancing skills, knowledge, and resources of individuals or organisations to address challenges.

**Co-creation**: The practice of collaboration with others to design a solution, create services or products, or share knowledge for an agreed purpose.

**Co-location**: Placing multiple different entities/services/organisations together in a single location.

**Commissioning**: The process of assessing needs, planning, procuring, and evaluating services.

**Community Asset Transfer** (CAT): An established process/mechanism used to enable the community ownership and management of publicly owned land and buildings.

**Community Assets**: Community assets may be buildings or land, of value to a local community (the definition can sometimes be used more widely to refer to other things of value e.g. resources, specific knowledge or equipment).

**Community Engagement**: Involving local communities in decision-making and service development.

**Community Right to Bid**: A national process operated locally allows communities the right to nominate buildings or land as an asset of community value. Once assets

go up for sale the community has 6 months to raise the finances to purchase the asset for the community.

**Community-Led**: Encouraging active involvement and leadership from community members.

**Compact:** An agreement or understanding between stakeholders outlining shared principles and commitments. (The previous name for the Shropshire Accord).

**Consultations:** A consultation is more formal than engagement and should have a defined scope, timescale and purpose, allowing respondents to influence decisions, service design, policies or other changes.

**Contingency planning**: A contingency plan is a course of action designed to help an organisation respond effectively to a significant future incident, event or situation that may or may not happen (such as grant or contract losses).

**Contract breach**: A failure to comply with the terms set out within a contract.

**Co-Production**: Collaborative approach involving service users and professionals as equal partners.

**Decommissioning**: Decommissioning is stopping provision of a service or a significant part of a service usually through the ending of a contract.

**Demographic**: The statistical characteristics of human populations.

**Directories**: In this context directories are databases of community information listing local services and support from community groups, clubs, societies and organisations.

**Donations in kind**: Non-financial contributions including things like food, clothing, medicines, furniture, office equipment, and building materials; or the performance of services without charge such as financial support, marketing, IT support etc.

**Early intervention**: Working to prevent problems occurring, or to tackle them head-on when they do, before problems get worse.

**Eligibility**: Having the necessary qualities or satisfying the necessary criteria/conditions to access a service or support.

**Emerging Needs**: Recognising and evidencing needs and new issues or themes emerging within data or through the provision of services and support.

**Engagement**: In this context, the ways groups and organisations seek to involve the public and other stakeholders in their work such as through events, discussion forums, meetings, surveys, feedback forms etc.

**Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI)**: Creating services, working environments and cultures where every individual can feel safe, experience a sense of belonging,

and is empowered to achieve their full potential regardless of different characteristics or backgrounds. Often linked to a commitment to ensuring equal opportunities and representation from diverse communities.

**External funding**: Funds brought into an area from an outside source rather than local grants, contracts or donations.

**Forums of Interest**: In this context, the groups operating to represent voluntary and community sector sub sectors in Shropshire and part of the structure of Shropshire VCS Assembly. Forums of interest bring together VCS groups and organisations with a shared interest in a type of service or community of interest or geography.

**Fundraising**: The act of gathering financial contributions by engaging with individuals, groups, businesses etc.

**GDPR**: The General Data Protection Regulation outlined in the Data Protection Act 2018.

**Governance arrangements**: A term used to describe the system by which organisations direct and control their functions and relate to their communities or service users, this may include the controls in place to effectively deliver policy requirements, finance, legal duties, risk etc.

**Impact assessment**: Consideration of the social impact of policies, programs, and services to ensure change does not disproportionately affect the most vulnerable.

**Independence:** In the context of the VCS this means recognising that voluntary and community sector groups and organisations are led independently by trustees/boards or other groups of elected or non-elected people. They are, or should not be, influenced by political bodies or government.

**Information Governance**:  Legislation and the framework for ensuring secure handling of information, including data protection.

**Information Sharing**: Making information available to partner groups and organizations to best meet the needs of local communities while complying with good practice and information governance.

**Information Sharing Agreement**: Formal agreement outlining information sharing and use among organisations.

**Integrated Care System (ICS)**: Partnership of health and care organisations for coordinated care.

**Marginalised communities**: Socio-economic groups and communities that experience discrimination and exclusion (social, political and economic) because of unequal power relationships.

**Market development**: Rather than a business growth strategy which aims to introduce a product to a new market, in the context of the public sector, market

development is usually used to refer to a commissioning body's work to support and develop the organisations and services they purchase from such as offering training, information and advice, financial investment, new ways of working etc.

**Market Engagement**: Consulting with potential service providers to assess capacity and stimulate competition.

**Mediator**: An independent person who will not take sides in a dispute between two parties but aims to facilitate agreement and a way forward.

**Mentoring**: The process of a mentor who teaches, gives help or guidance to a less experienced person.

**MOU**: A Memorandum of Understanding is not legally binding but it is a statement of intent, commitment or agreement between two or more bodies/parties.

**Multi-Agency Working**: Collaboration among different agencies for coordinated support.

**Needs Assessment**: Identifying and analysing needs to inform service planning and delivery.

**Options appraisal**: The process of defining objectives, examining options and weighing up the costs, benefits, risks and uncertainties of those options before a decision is made.

**Outcomes**: Desired changes, benefits or impacts from a service or intervention. Strategic outcomes are the high level, cross cutting ambitions set by an organisation or partnership.

**Outputs**: Tangible and measurable results of a service or intervention.

**Payment in arrears**: Payment after a service is provided or completed, not before.

**Performance Management**: The process of monitoring and evaluating service performance.

**Person-Centred Support**: Tailoring services to individual preferences and needs.

**Place-based Working**: Meeting the needs of Shropshire's communities through tailored local level support and co-location of support activities.

**Preventative Services**: Interventions designed to prevent or reduce health or social issues.

**Prevention**: Taking actions to avoid situations that require expensive or extensive services, like healthcare, social support, or emergency responses. It's about stopping problems before they become crises, ultimately saving time, money, and resources for everyone.

**Privacy**: The ability of an individual or group to seclude themselves or information about themselves, and thereby express themselves selectively. In the context of GDPR, the regulation gave people new rights in the way personal information in recorded, processed, stored, shared etc.

**Procurement**: The process of purchasing goods, services and works often with the use of a tendering or competitive bidding process.

**Protected characteristics**: These are characteristics set out in the Equality Act 2010: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation.

**Providers**: Entities delivering services based on contracts with Commissioners.

**Qualitative data**: Non-numeric data such as comments, open-ended survey questions, images, case studies, recordings etc.

**Quality Standard**: Defined criteria specifying expected service quality and performance.

**Quantitative data**: Measures of values or counts expressed as numbers e.g. how many, how often, how much.

**Referral**: A referral is when a service provider directs a client to another specific organisation or service for more specialised and comprehensive assistance. This process includes sharing detailed client information with the receiving organisation to ensure a smooth transition and continuous care.

**Referral pathways**: A referral pathway sets out the services, interventions and support available at each stage of a service user or patient's journey towards achieving improved health or wellbeing. This may include support from a single organisation or multiple organisations.

**Representation**: The action of speaking or acting on behalf of an individual, group or multiple groups and organisation. In the context of the VCS Assembly, representatives participate in partnership groups and meetings to voice issues/feedback/share views on behalf of the VCS, a forum of interest, sub-sector or VCSA members.

**Safeguarding:** Protecting individuals from harm, abuse, neglect, or exploitation.

**SALC**: Shropshire Association of Local Councils, a local body formed of membership of town and parish councils in Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin.

**Service User**: Individual receiving or eligible to receive services and support.

**Shropshire Accord**: A voluntary agreement between local public sector bodies and Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) groups and organizations, setting out shared values, principles, and commitments to better serve local people and communities in Shropshire.

**Signposting**: A method where the provider offers general guidance on accessing relevant services, resources, or support, without directly connecting the client to another organization or sharing their details. This approach helps clients explore and choose from available options.

**SIP**: Shropshire Infrastructure Partnership, a local partnership of VCS organisations working together to provide voluntary sector infrastructure support in Shropshire.

**Social Enterprise**: Organisations aiming to achieve social goals while generating income.

**Social Prescribing**: Referring individuals to non-medical community-based services.

**Social Value**: The economic, environmental and social value that is generated through provision of a service or through commissioning practice to make the best use of public money to deliver quality services for local people.

**Statutory services**: Services required by law.

**Sustainability**: In the context of the VCS the term is used to refer to the ability of groups and organisations to sustain their services in the future e.g. through access to funds, volunteers and other forms of essential resources.

**System Working**: Multiple services and organisations working together to form an efficient system of support; reducing the number of steps individuals and families need to take to find the right help and services.

**Tendering process**: The process typically involves drawing up a tender document, including technical and financial details, which is then sent to potential suppliers. The suppliers respond with their offers, and the client evaluates the offers and selects the most suitable supplier.

**Under-represented**: Individuals, groups or communities with insufficient or inadequate representation and influence within local decision making.

**User-Led**: Services or initiatives designed and run by service users.

**VCSA**: Voluntary and Community Sector Assembly.

**VCSE**: Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprise sector.

**Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS)**: Groups and organizations that operate on a voluntary basis to provide services and support to the community.

**Voluntary Sector Infrastructure Support**: Support services for voluntary and community sector groups and organisations such as grant advice, forming new groups and organisation, choosing the right governance model, training for trustees, volunteer recruitment and management etc.

**Voluntary**: Not paid for or motivated by financial gain or profit.

**Volunteer time calculations**: The process of demonstrating the value of volunteer input by calculating the volunteer time and applying a financial value such as the national minimum wage, average local wage etc.

**Volunteering**: Someone spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the environment, community or someone who they're not closely related to.

**Well-being**: A holistic understanding of health encompassing physical, mental, and social factors.

# Resources

**Shropshire VCS Assembly Website**

https://www.vcsvoice.org/

**Shropshire VCS Assembly and COG Prospectus**

https://www.vcsvoice.org/about-the-vcsa/vcsacog-prospectus/

**Shropshire Infrastructure Partnership**

https://sipshropshire.org.uk/

**ICS Memorandum of Understanding**

https://www.shropshiretelfordandwrekin.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/ICS-VCSE-Memorandum-of-Understanding-2021-1.pdf

**National Voluntary Sector Manifesto**

https://www.ncvo.org.uk/news-and-insights/news-index/the-voluntary-sector-manifesto/

**Department for Culture, Media and Sport, Civil Society Covenant**

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/civil-society-covenant-framework-launch

**NCVO Civil Society Covenant**

https://www.ncvo.org.uk/get-involved/civil-society-covenant/

Other resources to be added following feedback

# Signatories

| Organisation | Date |
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| Lead | |
| **Name:** | |
| **Role:** | |
| **Board/Committee:** | |
| Shropshire Accord Contact Officer | |
| **Name:** | |
| **Role:** | |

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