

# The Shropshire **ACCORD**



**For the public and voluntary sector  
delivering services for people in Shropshire**

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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.

However, the Shropshire Accord recognises that not all decisions on policy and funding will positively impact on the sector and specifically individual voluntary organisations. Therefore, a robust dispute resolution section is included in the document to support organisations through that process.

## **1. Independence (and political neutrality)**

We will all:

- Mutually respect other organisations positions and the constraints and pressures they face.
- Where possible, be guided by independent and impartial bodies, guidance and agreements/Memorandums of Understanding (MOU). Using mutually agreed and created guidance.
- Always act in the best interests of the public, rather than to a political aim.
- Take consideration of political agendas and ensure these do not influence relationships or partnership working detrimentally.

Public Sector and Commissioners:

- Respect the independence of VCS groups and organisations, including the right to campaign, regardless of any financial relationships with Shropshire's Public Sector bodies.
- Recognise that VCS organisations and groups are independent, even when commissioned or contracted by the public sector, and will maintain their independence to allow them to support the communities they serve and represent meaningfully

VCS groups and organisations:

- Understand that while statutory employees may be working under and affected by political pressures, they themselves serve the same public as the VCS.

## **2. Working with volunteers**

We will all:

- Use SIP guidelines, with the aim to involve SIP wherever possible to draw up contracts and recruit for volunteers.
- Commit to uplift the role of volunteers and uptake of volunteering Shropshire. Endeavour to support volunteering 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.
- Provide equal opportunities for volunteering, safeguarding, health and safety.
- Recognise and value the role of volunteers, including the management of and support provisions made to facilitate volunteers in an organisation or group.

- Ensure information is shared in a timely manner to support partnership working with volunteers.
- Be mindful of the impact of volunteering, timings and frequency of activities to support volunteer engagement within the VCS. Work together to resolve staffing and recruitment issues.
- Promote opportunities to access training and development opportunities for volunteers including opportunities to care for their wellbeing.
- Recognise and consider the impact of specialist skills required within the volunteer workforce, where specialist training and supervision is required this is to be facilitated, and financial implications considered where appropriate.
- Champion and recognise the impact and difference volunteers make to the community, rewarding their contributions as appropriate and demonstrating their value in a positive way.

Public sector and commissioners:

- Build in guidance and scoping if including in contracts, and reflect the financial implications of volunteer management as a professional role, reflect this in working arrangements to facilitate high standards and good quality care and support for volunteers within the VCS.
- Ensure contracts, commissions, and tenders reflect renumeration for expenses and other costs associated with supporting volunteers where they are identified as part of the workforce.
- Consider the benefits of volunteers as part of contracting and commissioning, but manage expectations to ensure reasonable objectives and outcomes are identified to promote positive experiences for volunteers and not detrimentally impact opportunities for organisations where they require funded staffing models.
- Be mindful that VCS organisations may have a shortage in volunteers.

### **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 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:

- Value the things that matter. We will work closely with beneficiaries and stakeholders, understand need and understand how our actions influence change, positively or negatively. By focusing on what matters we can best generate social value.
- Consider the social impact of policies, programmes and services to ensure change does not disproportionately affect the most vulnerable.
- Understand that, while counting can be useful, simple measures relating to size and scale, should be complemented by softer measures that pay attention to depth, duration, alternative arguments, and the importance which stakeholders place on the changes they experience. Collectively we will promote a more nuanced understanding of how activities result in change.
- Recognise the cross-cutting nature of a social value approach and its link to improving wellbeing in many different ways such as improving relationships, work, the places we live in and our environment, health, personal finances, education and skills, the economy, equality, democracy and much more.
- Take into account the different perspectives of impact due to the differing nature of the work and ways of internal measurement e.g. VCS may see a side of statutory service delivery statutory partners don't see and vice versa.
- Make use of available tools, frameworks and resources, where possible and appropriate, to adopt good practice.
- Keep up to date with changes such as the impact of the Procurement Act 2023 which focuses on making procurement and commissioning processes more accessible to smaller organisations and recognising social value, transparency and accountability in procurement practices.
- Work together to make the best use of public money to deliver quality services for local people.
- Promote the breadth of social value: fundraising, sustainability, volunteering, mentoring, donations in kind.

Public sector and commissioners will:

- Implement and maintain a social value policy and promote an organisational commitment to social value.
- Develop funding and contract opportunities at an appropriate size and scale to maximise the delivery of social value.
- Work to integrate the principles of social value into policies and commissioning and procurement practice.
- Review and monitor the way social value is integrated into commissioning and procurement practices and processes and generates benefits for the local supply chain.

- Recognise the costs involved in an effective social value approach, such as the costs of stakeholder engagement, voice and data collection and reporting.
- Establish the boundaries of what information and evidence must be included to measure social value to give a true and fair picture and inform decisions which focus on the changes that matter.
- Recognise that unintended and negative impacts are part of the process of trialling new approaches and services. Reporting unintended and negative impacts should be valued and used for shared learning and improvement in both service delivery and commissioning approaches.

VCSE organisations will:

- Constructively support and work with the public sector and commissioners to promote social value approaches whilst recognising public finances are stretched and commissioners are required to find efficiency savings, often have reduced budgets and face a growing level of community need and demand for services.
- Focus on the core areas of support and service delivered and the outcomes achieved. This can include avoiding the temptation to over complicate or over-claim social value.
- Consider transparency in social value reporting, funders and commissioners are not the only audience. Beneficiaries, other stakeholders and potential donors can benefit from learning more about social value and impact. Social value can be used as a way to communicate more widely the good work VCS groups and organisations deliver.
- Deliver organisational social value but also recognise that sharing social value information can help demonstrate the value of the VCS and its role in public service delivery.

## 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, to include this from the beginning and prioritise service users.
- Recognise the challenges faced by vulnerable communities in seeking and engaging with services to support them, and work together to find ways to maximise their engagement.
- Work together to incorporate the lived experience of community members in a way that adds meaning and value to projects, services, and support made available.

- Promote Expert by Experience opportunities to inform and influence services and decision making locally.

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.
- Use data well to identify and monitor emerging needs, ensuring this influences commissioning opportunities, service developments, and partnership working.
- Include solution focused outcomes and objectives to mitigate emerging needs when working in partnership with the VCS.
- Take consideration of the financial implications and constraints that may exist when tackling emerging needs across a vulnerable and dispersed community, the time and resources required to meaningfully address this, and the facilitation required to promote effective partnership working.
- Identify and articulate known barriers for vulnerable communities to support VCS organisations and groups to plan and prepare mitigations where these are possible.

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.
- Clearly describe limitations and challenges they foresee, or have experienced, to support realistic expectations and solutions when identifying ways to address emerging needs in the community.
- Be clear about what we can and cannot do to help identify and report emerging needs.
- Provide solution focused feedback when presenting emerging needs to public sector partners, assisting in the development of solutions where possible.

## 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.
- Recognise community assets and buildings as important hubs for support and response in an emergency, to ensure their security and functionality. Ensure that these buildings are being used to develop community resilience and preparedness even in times of safety.

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.
- Recognise community assets and buildings as important hubs for support and response in an emergency, to ensure their security and functionality. Ensure that these buildings are being used to develop community resilience and preparedness even in times of safety.

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.
- Provide accessible and meaningful data to support commissioning processes by contributing to local data sets and informing data developments.
- Develop better partnership working practices to promote the use of data and information to inform and influence commissioning, quality assurance, and service developments.
- Recognise the value of investing in appropriate resources to facilitate data, information, and feedback mechanisms, ensuring these are considered in commissioning activities and grant developments / applications.
- Create and contribute towards a shared data and intelligence system (if appropriate).

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 throughout 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.
- Work with VCS groups and organisations from the earliest stage of commissioning to design policies, programmes and services.
- Ensure all tender opportunities include clear expectations on data and intelligence requirements for consideration and inclusion in tender bids and Eols
- Provide accessible and sustainable methods to share data, intelligence, and information as part of reporting processes
- Provide clear and meaningful feedback on the use and impact of feedback, data, and intelligence provided as part of commissioned activity to ensure VCS organisations and groups can share impact with their communities and include this in future reporting/funding etc
- Meaningfully engage with the VCS in responding to data and intelligence or commissioning needs in the development of future commissioning activity or revision of current contracted arrangements
- Recognise the value and cost of a resourced administrative process to respond to contract reporting, data harvesting and intelligence gathering, whilst ensuring this is realistic and reflective of the contract in question (one size should not fit all)

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.
- Contribute towards a shared data bank within the VCS.
- Provide a key contact and resourced administrative processes to deliver against contract reporting, quality assurance, and communication with contract holders.
- Seek additional data and intelligence from the public sector to further evidence responses to commissioning opportunities.
- Promote and participate in commissioning development and research opportunities to support the development of more meaningful commissioning activity.

## 11. Decommissioning Well

We will all:

- Recognise that public sector budget challenges may lead to a growth in decommissioning practices.
- Minimise any 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 and impactful 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 coproduced decision making.
- Avoid decisions being made in isolation, understanding that our sectors combine to form a wider system of support and service provision 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.
- All partners will work with recipients of services to limit the impact of decommissioning where appropriate.
- 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.
- Ensure exit strategies are followed where these are in place
- Communicate decisions with sensitivity and consideration to all parties involved, stakeholders, and recipients of care / support / services

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.
- Make sure time is allocated to handover processes as part of the de-commissioning/re-commissioning process where there is a change in provider
- Coproduce decisions to de-commission or re-commission services, engaging with the community impacted by the potential decision.
- Ensure all decisions are addressed in the public domain with consideration to the reputational risk of all parties and communications are developed collaboratively where possible.

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.

- Engage with service beneficiaries and stakeholders in a timely manner to communicate decommissioning processes and minimise impact where appropriate.
- Develop robust and responsive systems to allow for exit strategies to be executed well and with sensitivity to those impacted.

## 12. Capacity Building and VCS Infrastructure

We will all:

- Endorse and evidence the impact of SIP achievements to VCSE infrastructure.
- 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 which working in partnerships brings, by properly resourcing and building capacity.

Public Sector and commissioners:

- 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:

- Highlight areas for improvement and make the business case for funding and infrastructure.
- Recognise the constraints the public sector may be under and work to find solutions.

## 13. Partnership and Representation

We will all:

- Agree that working in partnership is better for Shropshire's communities than working in isolation.
- Work with the VCSA as the main representative body of the VCS, using VCSA procedures for securing representation from the VCS. This is for transparency, to ensure that the representative can feedback to the rest of the VCSA and wider VCS.
- Present ideas to the VCSA Board and forums of interest for feedback.
- Respect representatives and their expertise. Representation should be tangible and authentic, with power, a voice and rights for all representatives.
- Support collaborations across and within sectors.
- Recognise diversity within the VCS and use and promote partnership structures.
- Acknowledge that misunderstandings occur and use the dispute resolution procedure.

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.

## 14. Communications 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 VCSA newsletter to communicate with the voluntary sector – Compact Updates section or regular article featuring news from Compact signatories.
- Bring information to each other in consultation for feedback, avoiding announcing at short notice when it will affect the service of one or the other unless strictly necessary.
- 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.
- Be flexible where possible, recognising that the public sector cannot always provide longer timescales for consultation.
- Make communication methods available to partners to promote communications through as many channels as is appropriate.
- Create and make use of simple ways to share messages across our platforms (consider proformas for third party content requests).
- Identify the right audiences and promote communications through the most effective and appropriate channels.
- Take a shared responsibility for ensuring key messages are communicated well across the sectors and communities we engage with, providing feedback and reflecting on practice to improve these methods and mechanisms regularly.

Public sector and Commissioners:

- Upskilling VCS communications with training, volunteers.
- Assess the impact of new policies and legislation on the VCS, and reduce bureaucratic burdens on organisations.
- Utilise the relationships the VCS has in communities and use them to make engagement more effective.

- Conduct 12 week formal consultations, where appropriate. When this is not possible, clear explanations and rationale for shorter time frames or a more informal approach will be provided.
- Collaborate with VCS partners on how best to develop and execute consultations, and coproduce them with Experts by Experience or community representatives.
- Work with community representatives and VCS reps to develop communications that will be accessible and meaningful to the community you wish to communicate with. Ensuring that as many concerns or implications are addressed as early as possible to promote meaningful engagement with communications.
- Develop communication plans and strategies that work with and respond to the needs of the community and VCS organisations and groups, as well as addressing key public sector agendas.
- Provide feedback to the VCSA and key stakeholders on the use of intelligence gathered from communications and consultations, closing the loop on a "You Said, We Did" approach.

## 15. Emergency and Disaster

We will all:

- Support CVEC to coordinate effectively between the VCSE and the public sector.
- Engage with a diverse range of groups to approach response on a whole society level. Crises can impact communities in unequal ways, disadvantaged communities may be more at risk of severe, lasting consequences.
- Involve neighbourhood level mutual aid networks.
- Build community resilience, particularly in more vulnerable or less prepared areas.
- Apply a 'preparedness' and 'resilience' lens.
- Understand that funding and reimbursement for these services will be negotiated on a case-by-case basis. While regular incidents might not have dedicated funding, larger incidents may receive financial support.
- Listen and respond to lived experience, both before, during and after an incident.
- Focus on clear messaging and communication. Utilise local networks to disseminate key information that may come from a national, regional or countywide level.
- When designing and carrying out exercises, ensure local VCSE organisations and communities most likely to be affected are meaningfully included.
- Relationship building with communities in a sustained manner to ensure strong partnerships are in place, and can be used, in times of emergency.
- See where learning can be applied from emergency or crisis situations, both to be better prepared for future incidents and to enhance working practice outside of unprecedented times.
- Seek opportunities to apply for joint funding.

The public sector and commissioners will:

- Recognise VCSE and civil society as a critical infrastructure for crisis response and disaster planning. Recognise the reach and scale of VCSE into communities and

- provide support and investment.
- Provide training in crisis response for the VCSE.
- Recognise the need for cross-sector funding for the VCSE, to ensure enhanced service delivery, resilience and preparedness. All services should take into account that a lack of funding for the sector may mean crucial VCSE services cease to operate.
- Adopt participatory measures in the co-design of policy, understanding community needs and awareness raising activities.
- Act swiftly to mobilise and support the VCSE, removing traditional barriers – such as administrative barriers to enable action.
- VCS Groups and organisations will:
- Co-operate where possible with public sector partners, planning groups and emergency services to plan for, and respond to, emergencies.
- Share information and stories from the community which can better deliver emergency preparedness and response.
- Disseminate important information and awareness raising amongst the community and with others in the VCSE, particularly grassroots groups.
- Be aware of the variety of responsibilities and legal duties of the public sector in an emergency.
- If public sector services are needed to respond to an emergency, contact the relevant teams as soon as possible with specific requests.

## 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 significant impact on services or public trust, a public statement must be issued 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](mailto: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 Appendix).
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 Compact 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 Compact 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.

### **Theme Ambassadors**

Each theme within the Accord would be supported by one or two Theme Ambassadors, ideally drawn from both the voluntary and community sector and the public sector. Their role would be to:

- Act as connectors and champions for their theme.
- Encourage ongoing dialogue and peer learning.
- Collect and share examples of effective practice, challenges, or opportunities relating to their theme.

Ambassadors are not formal leads or decision-makers, but act as a point of contact and reflection.

### **Working Groups**

In support of the Ambassadors, optional Working Groups may be formed around each theme. These groups would be open to any interested party and would:

- Meet twice a year (suggested: spring and autumn).
- Provide a space for discussion, learning, and review of practice.
- Feed into the Accord's formal review process.

These groups are intended to be informal and responsive, encouraging inclusive participation across sectors and roles.

## **Theme Assignment**

Theme Ambassadors would be identified through self-nomination or peer nomination following the Accord's adoption. Coordination would be supported by the Voluntary and Community Sector Assembly and Shropshire Council to ensure a balanced and inclusive spread of representation.

## **Feedback and Reporting**

- Ambassadors would be invited to submit a short annual summary, structured around:
- Notable successes or examples of good practice.
- Barriers or tensions encountered.
- Recommendations for strengthening the implementation of their theme.

These summaries would be used to inform the Accord's annual review and ongoing development.

## **Integration with Dispute Resolution**

While Ambassadors would not handle formal disputes, they could serve as an early informal contact point for concerns related to their theme. In this capacity, they may offer guidance, clarify expectations, or signpost individuals to the appropriate escalation routes. Their insight would also help identify recurring issues that might benefit from wider discussion or systemic changes.

## **Summary Benefits**

- Promotes shared ownership of the Accord across all signatories.
- Enables ongoing learning and improvement.
- Strengthens cross-sector relationships and peer support.
- Provides a simple mechanism for monitoring the Accord in practice.

## **Alternative Proposal: Accord Ambassadors and Implementation Group**

As we finalise the Shropshire Accord and look ahead to implementation, it is important that we strike a balance between shared ownership and practical deliverability.

Initial proposals around thematic ambassadors and working groups rightly sought to embed the Accord into ongoing practice across sectors. However, there is a risk that this approach may be resource-intensive for both statutory partners and the VCSE, particularly at a time of constrained capacity and increasing demand. In response, this model offers a lighter-touch alternative, still rooted in partnership, mutual accountability and learning, but designed to be proportionate, flexible and achievable within existing systems and pressures.

## **Accord Ambassadors**

Each Accord Ambassador represents one of the key system partners:

- The VCSE sector
- The Local Authority
- Health
- Other public sector signatories e.g. schools, police, fire, town and parish councils.

Ambassadors are not formal representatives or lead decision-makers, but act as named points of connection and reflection for their organisation or sector in relation to the Accord.

## **Key functions**

- Facilitate informal conversations around how the Accord is being used in practice.
- Bring forward examples of good working relationships, unresolved concerns, or practical barriers.
- Help coordinate light-touch reflection or learning activity once or twice a year.
- Support the resolution of issues before they escalate.

## **Accord Implementation Group**

The three Ambassadors form a tri-sector Implementation Group, which will meet at least twice annually. It will act as a central reflection and coordination point, with the following responsibilities:

- Review how the Accord is being interpreted and applied across sectors.
- Coordinate feedback and insight for the Accord's annual review.
- Identify recurring issues or opportunities for better joint working.
- Liaise with relevant strategic boards to ensure that the Accord remains connected to wider system priorities.
- The group may rotate a chair to share ownership and maintain cross-sector balance.

## **Resolving and Learning from Issues**

A light and proportionate process is proposed:

### **Stage 1: Direct conversation**

Where there is concern that expectations set out in the Accord are not being met, the first step is an open conversation between the relevant parties.

### **Stage 2: Raised with Accord Ambassadors**

If the issue cannot be resolved directly, it can be raised with the three Ambassadors for a joint discussion. The aim is to find a collaborative solution or clarify expectations.

### Stage 3: Escalation to relevant system board

If the issue highlights a wider or systemic concern, it can be referred by the Ambassadors to the strategic partnership board for reflection, resolution, or shared learning.

### Learning

Key themes, insights, or unresolved tensions can be captured (anonymised where appropriate) and fed back into the Accord's annual review process, as well as shared through sector communications and forums to inform wider practice.

### Benefits of the Model

- Keeps the Accord active and relevant without adding burden to existing structures.
- Enables informal resolution and peer-led learning across sectors.
- Connects real-world insight to strategic decision-making.
- Supports joint ownership and accountability through proportionate, relational leadership.

## Shropshire Accord Glossary of Terms Used

**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).

**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).

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**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 is 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.

**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.