

Worcestershire VCSE Alliance



Annual Report June 2024 - June 2025

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1. Forward

This year has been a year of progress and change for the Alliance. As we continue to strengthen the role of the VCSE within the Integrated Care System, we have also navigated important transitions in leadership, staffing, and representation.

We are grateful to the Alliance Board, whose members have given their time and expertise to guide us through this period. Their commitment has ensured continuity and kept the Alliance moving forward.

This year also saw changes in our leadership. We thank Amanda Kilroy, who served as Independent Chair from May to December 2024, for her significant contribution in engaging with stakeholders and helping to shape the Alliance's future direction. We are delighted to welcome Sarah Dugan as our new Independent Chair, bringing with her a wealth of knowledge and experience to support the Alliance in addressing the complex challenges of VCSE integration.

Alongside this, the VCSE Lead, Esther Passingham transferred into Worcestershire County Council following three years of work building the Alliance's foundations. We warmly welcome our new partnership with Community Power, with Simone Thompson taking on the role of VCSE Lead for Health to continue driving forward this important work.

Our representation across the Integrated Care System has also strengthened. We thank Mick Gillick for his contribution as VCSE Representative on the Health Inequality Board, and welcome Alethea ("Leeya") Balbuena, who now represents the sector both on that Board and the Adult Mental Health Inpatient & Rehabilitation Services Redesign Steering Group. We are also grateful to Chris Roberts for his ongoing role representing the VCSE on the Health and Wellbeing Board.

Steve Brewster, CEO of Active Herefordshire and Worcestershire has chaired the VCSE Mental Health Providers Steering Group throughout 2024 and 2025. Steve has been a great support and advocate for this key area of work and continues to lead the group in development new projects in 2026 and onwards.

Key Successes

- Strengthened the Alliance's voice within the Integrated Care System through new representation on key Boards and Steering Groups.
- Delivered workshops and engagement sessions that brought together over 40 stakeholders, supporting collaboration and shaping the Alliance's future direction.
- Maintained momentum through leadership transitions, ensuring continuity and a shared vision for the Alliance.

- Built a new partnership with Community Power, securing capacity and expertise to take forward the Alliance's workstreams.
- Supported the evolution of the REACH Community Research Project, embedding a model of community-led commissioning.

Key Challenges

- Navigating leadership and staffing transitions, while maintaining continuity of relationships and delivery.
- Securing sustainable resourcing to support the Alliance's role and ensure ongoing capacity for engagement and representation.
- Addressing the complexity of embedding VCSE voices meaningfully within Integrated Care System structures and decision-making.

These changes, successes, and challenges all reflect the resilience and growing influence of the Alliance. With new leadership, renewed partnerships, and strong representation across the system, we are well placed to build on the progress of 2024–25 and to continue strengthening the voice and impact of the VCSE in the years ahead.

2. Board Acknowledgement

We would like to extend our sincere thanks to the Alliance Board, whose members have dedicated their time, energy, and expertise to guiding the Alliance during this period of change. From May 2024, the Board comprised:

- **Pete Sugg** – Young Solutions
- **Rachel Jones** – Act On Energy
- **Lee McKenzie** – Sandycroft Centre
- **Chris Roberts** – Citizens Advice Bromsgrove and Redditch
- **Paul Raper** – Simply Limitless
- **Steve Brewster** – Active Herefordshire and Worcestershire
- **Gary Roskell** – Bromsgrove and Redditch Network (BARN)
- **Kate Harvey** – Onside Advocacy
- **Julia Neal** – Age UK Herefordshire and Worcestershire - finished September 2024
- **Lucy Wells** – Worcestershire Community Foundation - finished December 2024

We welcomed two new Board Members in June 2025:

- **Clare Thomas** – Age UK Wyvern
- **Mike Wilkinson** – St Richards Hospice

All board members have provided leadership and commitment that has been vital to ensuring continuity and driving forward the Alliance's work.

3. Independent Chair

From May to December 2024, Amanda Kilroy served as the Alliance's Independent Chair. Amanda met with more than 40 stakeholders, and undertook a detailed review of the Alliance, and facilitated workshops with both the Board and the VCSE Mental Health Steering Group. Her contribution was highly valued and has helped shape the Alliance's future direction.

Following a vacancy in the role at the start of 2025, the Board and staff were delighted to welcome Sarah Dugan as Independent Chair. Sarah retired in 2024 from her role as Chief Executive of the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Health and Care Trust. Sarah brings with her extensive knowledge, skills, experience and enthusiasm for supporting the VCSE Sector and Alliance strategically. Sarah Chaired the Sustainability Transformation Programme (STP) prior to the launch of the Integrated Care System (ICS) and is extremely well placed to lead the Alliance in addressing the complex challenges of VCSE integration into the ICS.

4. Staff Changes

The role of the Alliance VCSE Lead, held by Esther Passingham since 2021, transitioned during the year. Initially funded by Worcestershire County Council, the role was transferred into the Council on 1 January 2025, with a new focus on Adults and Communities. Esther's work over a three-year period laid a strong foundation for the Alliance, which the Board is committed to developing and growing.

To ensure continuity, the Alliance formed a partnership with Community Power, who began supporting the work from 1 May 2025. Simone Thompson is now supporting the Alliance as VCSE Lead for Health.

The REACH Community Research Project also entered a new phase, evolving into a model where community organisations take the lead in commissioned work. We extend our thanks to Branwen Bingle and Sarah Wilkinson for their progressive and valuable contributions to Community Led Research during their 12-month contract, which concluded in December 2024.

In communications, we said farewell to Kay Bruton, Communications Lead, in May 2024, and welcomed Leigh-Anne Beatty, who supported the Alliance until March 2025. Community Power has now taken on responsibility for communications, ensuring this important function continues to strengthen.

5. VCSE Representation

There were also changes in VCSE representation across Integrated Care System Boards during the year.

Chris Roberts, CEO of Citizens Advice Bromsgrove and Redditch, continues to represent the VCSE on the Health and Wellbeing Board, providing continuity and ensuring the sector's voice remains strong in key system discussions.

Mick Gillick MBE served as the VCSE Representative on the Health Inequality Board until September 2024. We are grateful for Mick's commitment and the valuable perspective he brought to this role. Following a recruitment and selection process, Alethea ("Leeya") Balbuena, Director of Operations and Deputy CEO of MIND, was appointed as his successor. In addition to joining the Health Inequality Board, Leeya also took on VCSE representation on the Adult Mental Health Inpatient & Rehabilitation Services Redesign Steering Group, strengthening the sector's voice in this important area.

Worcestershire Association of Carers, Onside and MIND provide VCSE representation on the NHS Mental Health Collaborative, which meets on a monthly basis.

Michael Hunter and Pete Sugg from Young Solutions provide VCSE Representation on the Adults and Children Safeguarding Boards and Children's Partnership.

6. Alliance Vision

Working together to help make Worcestershire a better and healthier place to live and work.

Aim

To promote a strong and visible VCSE sector working collaboratively to deliver excellent services that is aligned to need.

Objectives

- a.** Facilitate effective countywide communication, engagement and understanding between the VCSE and statutory sector.
- b.** Encourage VCSE collaboration and facilitate co-development of services to strengthen services and support available to the population of Worcestershire.
- c.** Develop knowledge and understanding of the VCSE sector to amplify activity and impact across the county.

- d. Ensure the sustainability of the VCSE Alliance, enabling the sector to flourish as an active partner in the ICS.

7. How the Alliance has worked to achieve its objectives in 2024-25

a) Facilitate effective countywide communication, engagement and understanding between the VCSE and statutory sector.

VCSE Partnership Event with Worcestershire Acute Hospitals: November 2024

This face-to-face event brought together Worcestershire Acute Hospitals and a wide range of Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations that provide health and wellbeing services to Worcestershire residents. With approximately 80 attendees from VCSE organisations, the event serves as a vital platform to strengthen collaboration between the NHS and the VCSE sector.

The key objectives of this event were:

1. To facilitate meaningful engagement and consultation on the recently developed Public Patient Engagement Strategy with VCSE organisations.
2. To build relationships with key VCSE organisations supporting health and wellbeing services in Worcestershire.
3. To gain a deeper understanding of how VCSE organisations currently support patients and explore opportunities to enhance these efforts.
4. To identify potential avenues for scaling up VCSE services and broadening their support for Worcestershire Acute Hospitals.
5. To recognise and address barriers that may hinder effective partnerships between VCSE organisations and Worcestershire Acute Hospitals.
6. To co-develop solutions that foster long-term collaboration, ensuring that VCSE organisations play a central role in improving patient care and health outcomes.

The event was a great success and began the process of fostering open dialogue and partnership-building, build bridges, amplify voices, and worked towards creating a shared vision for a more integrated and patient-centred healthcare system in Worcestershire.

Other communications and engagement activities:

The Alliance has continued to develop a range of communications to keep VCSE colleagues up to date. These included:

- Alliance website: a range of information and resources about the VCSE sector and Public Sector partners
- Newsletters: distributed every six weeks, providing up to date information about health and wellbeing news in Worcestershire
- Webinars: delivered on a range of topics
- General Engagement: Visits to a wide range of VCSE organisations and partnership meetings to promote the work of the Sector

- Networks and Webinars: A range of speakers and networks have been held online, bringing together VCSE organisations to focus on particular topics and areas of work

b) Encourage VCSE collaboration and facilitate co-development of services to strengthen services and support available to the population of Worcestershire.

The VCSE Alliance Forum: May 2025

The VCSE Alliance welcomed over 70 organisations to this face-to-face event. It provided a positive opportunity for people to meet the new Chair, Sarah Dugan, discuss research findings, hear about a range of developments and importantly network with other VCSE colleagues from across the county.

Participants were asked to review the findings of understanding the VCSE Sector and identify appropriate recommendations and action points through discussion and reflection on the findings within their group.

Speakers included the Social Value Engine and Connect to Work. The Alliance provided a summary of the work it had been carrying out. The event also provided an opportunity to network and build relationships, and facilitate discussions with staff from health and wellbeing services.

VCSE Mental Health Programme

The Alliance has continued to lead a project to develop ways of integrating VCSE and NHS mental health pathways, to reduce demand on primary mental health care, improve waiting time experience and optimise treatment. This work is being funded by Herefordshire and Worcestershire Health and Care Trust.

The work is helping to shape community mental health pathways and have the capability and capacity of delivering mental health interventions in collaboration with statutory sector partners through a population health management approach. This includes:

- Delivering specific 'Managing Emotions' groups to people in Redditch (the area with the longest waiting lists for these groups) – workshop on 18th May to finalise delivery details
- Expanding group provision in other areas based on those areas with the longest waiting lists – using the model developed for Redditch
- Building on successful provision in the VCSE, specifically the Community Mental Health Transformation programme
- Working out a means of providing funding to local organisations to support mental ill-health prevention work

The Alliance also commissioned Worcestershire Association of Carers to carry out research into VCSE Mental Health provision in the county. To see these research reports, please follow these links:

[Phase-Two-Intelligence-Gathering.pdf](#) and [VCSE-Alliance-VCSE-Mental-Health-Provision-Research-September-2023-Phase-One-21092023-003.pdf](#)

Core 20 Plus Community Connectors

This work is tackling Health Inequalities in Worcestershire and helping to breakdown health barriers.

The programme focuses on building trust, breaking down barriers, and making health services more accessible for groups who've been historically left out of the conversation.

Empowering Pakistani & Bangladeshi Women

Working with Sandycroft Community Centre in Redditch, we've increased awareness of local health services, tackling cultural and language barriers, and streamlining referral pathways. As a result, more women are accessing preventative care, more NHS staff are making effective referrals, and community voices are shaping health priorities.

Some of the key successes of the project include:

- **Trust & Relationships:** Strong links with community members and leaders.
- **Tailored Outreach:** Drop-ins, co-designed sessions, and culturally relevant engagement.
- **Collaboration:** Stronger partnerships between healthcare providers and community organisations.

Other activities that have helped to strengthen the work in relation to this objective include the Community Wellbeing Roles Network and the development of the VCSE Faculty (part of the ICS Academy). For more information about the Academy and access to a wide range of free and low costs course, go to [NHS Herefordshire & Worcestershire Integrated Care System Academy Exchange](#).

c) Develop knowledge and understanding of the VCSE sector to amplify activity and impact across the county.

There are two key projects the Alliance has developed to support this objective.

- Understanding and Strengthening the VCSE Sector
- REACH: Research, Engagement and Community Health

Understanding and Strengthening the VCSE sector in Worcestershire

This has been a key area of work for the Alliance to achieve this objective. There have been 3 phases of ‘understanding’ the VCSE Sector. Tiller Research were commissioned to undertake phase one and two of the research. The University of Worcester was commissioned to undertake the additional qualitative research for Phase Three.

The phases were:

- Phase 1: Scoped the number and type of VCSE organisations providing services in the county
[TILL_2073_VCSEAlliance_US_FINALv1.1.pdf](#)
- Phase 2: Carried out a countywide survey to VCSE organisations to collate a range of information about organisations and their opportunities and challenges
- Phase 3: Developing in depth qualitative information through focus groups and 1:1 interviews (held in November 2024).

[Phase2and3-UandS-VCSEAllianceForum.pptx](#)

The outcomes from the research are:

1. Increase and evidence knowledge of the VCSE Sector by district and service area (charities, social enterprises, community groups).
2. Create a “map” of VCSE Sector services and overlay these services on to JSNA, IMD and other relevant data to identify gaps and duplication.
3. Improve the knowledge around gaps in services exist and the potential impact this has on residents, and where this leads to an increased demand on public services
4. Enhance information sharing with ICS partners to assist in service design and alignment to need
5. Capture and provide information to enable the VCSE Sector to plan more effectively, build collaborative working and be better prepared to manage oncoming challenges
6. Through self-assessment methods, collate knowledge relating to capacity and skills of the VCSE Sector workforce. Where possible identify gaps in workforce and skills, and develop training/development in partnership with the ICS Academy

7. Develop methods to demonstrate VCSE social impact to feed in to “the system” and aide partnership development.
8. Provide data/evidence of priority areas to funders/commissioners with a clearer rationale of need to secure further investment
9. Shape and strengthen the VCSE Alliance strategic plan and delivery plans
10. Inform new innovative VCSE community powered health and wellbeing projects

[A Community-Powered NHS - New Local](#)

Interviews and focus groups were facilitated between 28th November 2024 and 17th February 2025, exploring in more detail the themes identified in Phase Two.

Participants were given a choice of format: a one-to-one interview or focus group conducted online or face-to-face. A flexible topic guide was used. The researchers led the conversation guided by a set of key questions but were responsive to exploring areas of interest and new ideas raised by participants. This approach allows participants to describe issues more fully, and identifies a wider range of issues than can be covered by a pre-written set of questions.

The topics covered were:

- Perceptions of the landscape of current VCSE services locally
- Strengths of the local VCSE sector
- Current issues for the local VCSE sector
- Areas for development for the local VCSE sector
- Opportunities (current and emerging) for the local VCSE sector
- Gaps in services for communities, and the impact of any gaps

Focus groups and interviews were audio recorded with participants’ permission, and transcribed. All interview and focus group participants completed a consent form. A qualitative thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was undertaken by two University of Worcester researchers to identify key themes from the transcripts.

REACH Programme - Research, Engagement and Community Health

The mission of REACH is to make health research more accessible to people who face health inequalities or are historically less engaged in health services and research.

The project aim is to connect with communities whose voices are often missing from research and ensure they have the knowledge, support, and opportunities to get involved.

Community First has been commissioned to lead this programme. They are:

- **Raise awareness** and improve research literacy using REACH framework.
- **Engage grassroots groups** interested in community-led research.
- **Provide training and support** through the REACH community research programme.
- **Help create ‘community satellite hubs’** for ongoing research activity.

The Alliance and Community First is working with community groups and voluntary sector partners to engage with priority groups, including:

1. **Older people** — particularly those living in the top 10% most deprived areas, often managing multiple long-term health conditions.
2. **Communities in high-need areas** — those within the top 10% on the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD).
3. **Ethnically diverse communities** — including Pakistani and Bangladeshi women, Ukrainian and Afghan refugees, and Eastern European and migrant populations.
4. **People experiencing poor mental health or social isolation** — including individuals with neurodiversity.
5. **Rurally isolated communities** — such as Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) communities, and those in farming and agricultural settings.

Why This Matters

Health research shapes the treatments, services, and policies that affect us all. But when certain communities are left out, their needs and experiences are overlooked. The REACH Programme is here to change that — by breaking down barriers, building trust, and making sure every community's voice counts in shaping the future of healthcare.

d) Ensure the sustainability of the VCSE Alliance, enabling the sector to flourish as an active partner in the Integrated Care System

To ensure the Alliance was meeting the guidelines in the ICS Design Framework [Report template - NHSI website](#), a review was carried out by the Independent Chair and recommendations presented to strategic partners and the Alliance Board. These have helped to shape future plans.

The funding for the Alliance, as with the majority of the VCSE Sector, remains a challenge. In this period, funding was received from Strengthening Communities in Worcestershire County Council to support the VCSE Lead and Independent Chair, Research Engagement Network for REACH and NHSE Core 20 Plus 5 for Community Connectors.

Building strategic relationships across the ICS is a fundamental area of work for the Alliance. In 2021 a Memorandum of Association was developed between the Worcestershire ICS Place Partnership Board and the VCSE Alliance. The Alliance Chair has been a partner of the Place Partnership Board, contributing key insights to influence strategic developments.

Another key part of enabling the VCSE Sector to flourish as part of the ICS, is the representation on Boards and Committees. The Alliance has facilitated the placement of a number of strategic leaders to sit on boards and committees. This work continues to be developed with further positions to be identified in the future.

8. Alliance Financial Summary for 2024-2025

Income & Expenditure Summary	
Funds Received by Young Solutions	
Income £	
Alliance Initial Funding B/F	54,772
Contribution towards VCSE Alliance - WCC	600
REACH - REN funding	19,350
Worcestershire Acute Trust - Event Contribution	2,530
	77,252
Direct Project Costs	
Mental Health Project Costs	2,924
REACH - Community Led Research Project	32,391
VCSE Alliance Development	16,945
	52,260
Expenditure	
Room Hire/Costs - Alliance Meetings	173
Website Costs	42
IT Costs	1,763
Engagement Events & Promotions	102
Staff Learning & Development	960
Accountancy	2,010
Hosting Fees	1,065
	6,115
Total Expenditure	58,375
2024/25 Surplus	18,878

The remaining funds of £18,878 will be carried forward into 2025/26 to continue the associated project work.

9. Aspirations for 2025-2026

Our hopes and aspirations for 2025/26 are rooted in a simple but powerful ambition: to continue championing the VCSE sector as a vital force for positive change. We want to build on the progress already made, embedding new ways of working through initiatives such as the VCSE Champions and the VCSE Charter, while fostering deep, meaningful relationships between our sector and statutory partners.

At the heart of this vision is a commitment to ensure that the voice and expertise of the VCSE sector are recognised and valued in shaping the services and structures that impact our communities.

We aspire to strengthen dialogue with senior public sector leaders and decision-makers, enabling the sector's insight and experience at the grassroots level to play a central role in service planning and delivery. By working closely with VCSE infrastructure groups, we want to establish clear, sustainable channels of communication that capture the voice of the community.

We want to support an engagement plan that captures the voices of communities at the most local level, through forums, locality boards, and other participatory models. This work will ensure that all communities—whether defined by neighbourhood, need, or shared interest—are heard, while also challenging divides between rural and urban areas.

Looking forward, we will also play an active role in facilitating conversations about how to address gaps and opportunities within emerging structures, with a particular focus on capacity building. Supporting ongoing discussion and knowledge-sharing across sectors, deepening mutual understanding of systems, structures, activities, and outcomes.

Above all, we will continue to “fly the flag” for community-led solutions, working hand-in-hand with partners to champion co-commissioning, co-design, and co-production. By doing so, we hope to create a landscape where collaboration is the norm, and where the strengths of communities are at the forefront of shaping the future.

10. THANK YOU

The VCSE Alliance would like to thank the following key statutory partners for their guidance, encouragement and support. This has been invaluable in helping the Alliance to navigate change, strengthen partnerships, and continue building a strong and connected VCSE sector.

Worcestershire County Council

Paul Robinson

Mark Fitton

Lisa McNally

Hannah Perrott

Lisa Bedford

NHS Health and Care Trust

Sue Harris

Integrated Care Board

Sarah Speck

Community Power

Christine Price

Simone Thompson