



# **Empowering Communities**

**Our Strategic Plan  
to sustain and strengthen  
the voluntary sector  
in Staffordshire  
2016-2025**

Updated by the Board of Trustees 4 February 2019 (v4)

## Contents

| <b>Strategic Plan 2016-2025</b>                    | page |
|--|------|
| • What is Support Staffordshire trying to achieve? | 3    |
| • How will we go about this?                       | 4    |
| • Our Ethos?                                       | 4    |
| • Long-term Economic Outlook and Strategy          | 5    |
| • Strategic Aims                                   | 6    |

## **What is Support Staffordshire trying to achieve?**

Support Staffordshire **empowers communities** to be the best they can be. It supports **communities, individuals** and **organisations** to work **in collaboration** to **bring about positive change** in their community by **actively encouraging Social Action**

Our services aim to:

- increase people's skills and knowledge
- harness people's drive, enthusiasm and energy
- enhance individual and family livelihoods
- build capacity in neighbourhoods & communities
- improve the relationships and resilience of organisations and individuals

We deliver in three main ways:

- Advancing Individual Social Action and Volunteering For All
- Supporting Community and Organisational Development, especially through effective, influential and local, voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations.
- Convening Across Organisations and Collaborating with a Strong Collective Voice; in recognition that VCSE organisations are interdependent on a myriad of other local organisations, public bodies and local businesses with the same aims.

## **How will we go about this? Our Ethos**

### **1. Positive Community, Family and Person Centred**

We take an assets (skills, experience, knowledge, connections, capacity & potential) approach in supporting communities, families and individuals

This is focused on what people can do, not what they cannot. We support this by addressing people's needs and vulnerabilities.

We believe organisations should facilitate and support in ways that are backed by appropriate evidence. We never impose external solutions; these rarely work and never last.

### **2. Local Focus and Empowerment**

We seek understanding, develop solutions and make decisions with and as close to those affected as possible.

The greater the distance between power and impact; the greater the risk of long-term failure.

We don't seek to do what people can better do for themselves.

### **3. Sharing, Learning, Resilience**

We recognise the important role of innovation and learning from experience as we go, rather than only being concerned with the end outcome.

Sharing information and understanding should be automatic where it benefits people and communities.

Resilience can mean learning to do things differently as well recovering from setbacks.

### **4. Fairness and Equality**

Everyone has something to give and should be given a fair chance to reach their potential.

The most excluded should be supported to fulfil their talent and ambition.

### **5. Building Relationships of Trust**

People succeed when they work together for a common good.

Trusting one another to act with integrity and commitment demands compassion, honesty, transparency, respect and time

## Long-term Economic Outlook and Strategy

What has historically been known as Voluntary Sector Infrastructure or CVS-type services have lost significant favour from central government and previously important funders including the National Lottery, since around 2013.

Traditional sources of local funding from local authorities and the NHS remain under sustained pressure through this current period of austerity, and this continues to impact and limit wider investment in our work as we have an unstable base from which to work. This will not change in the foreseeable future.

Marketisation, though perhaps less explicit a driver than a few years ago, remains a major factor in our service changes; meaning a trend or at least an external pressure towards the 'customer' paying for service from the bottom up. This has also introduced an element of greater competition for our services both within the CVS sector and with private consultants and advisers.

In 2014 an Independent Commission on the 'Future of Local Infrastructure' gave a ringing endorsement of the role of infrastructure and put the case for state and local authority investment, but held back from giving a firm view on the market approach.

Marketisation whilst perhaps bearable with regard to support services says little about the other CVS-like functions. Our role as the convenor and champion is not adequately recognised or resourced by investors, nor has a membership fee structure been possible to establish or make sufficient in this regard.

In mid- 2018 the Office for Civil Society published its long awaited Civil Society Strategy. The strategy does recognise the need for local support systems, though it steers away from equating this to CVSs. It is also extremely light on how the strategy is to be implemented or resourced. At the time of writing (November 2018), the Minister had just resigned, leaving uncertainty over future leadership from central government. For the time being nothing has fundamentally changed.

In this context, Support Staffordshire continues to need to:

- Control and manage costs successfully, limiting reserves spending to capital and developmental investments
- Embed a clear and fair pricing structure for the sale of our core support services; and develop new services based upon the needs of our members
- Make long-term stable arrangements with third party investors to subsidise or make free, some of our core support services based upon community need and investor priorities; currently this is mainly local authority investment
- Develop unrestricted income from donors, both corporate and individual to grow the subsidised and free support offered to those most in need.
- Develop trading related income from effective use of building assets in Lichfield, Burton, Cannock and Leek; and extend sustainable building assets where appropriate
- Consider other, innovative forms of investment such as endowments

## **Strategic Aims**

Drawing together our strategic purpose, the context in which we are operating and the financial resources at our disposal, we have proposed the following four Strategic Aims which we believe will remain critical over the next decade or so of Support Staffordshire's evolution.

### **Aim 1: Empowering Communities**

We will make the most of our assets, consistently improving on these foundations and learning across the organisation. We will share best practice to build and sustain a set of high quality, core support services, delivered across the county, that will sustain and strengthen Staffordshire's VCSE sector.

### **Aim 2: Building the Evidence Base**

Using our grass roots relationships and customer connections in combination with open data and improved information management systems to paint a clear and comprehensive picture of Staffordshire's assets, needs, opportunities and challenges. This will inform our ongoing business planning.

### **Aim 3: Ready for New Opportunities**

Whilst building on the successful business we have, we must also be ready to change how we work to take advantage of new and emerging opportunities that fit within our values and purpose. This will increasingly be informed by the growing evidence base at our disposal and allow us to set as well as respond to the emerging public agenda.

### **Aim 4: Fit to Function**

All of this is underpinned by the need for a fit for purpose, viable, functioning organisation.

***This Strategic Plan will be lightly reviewed annually and more thoroughly reviewed before each Business Planning period commences.***

***It forms the basis of the Business Plan for 2019-2021***