



Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Healthy Communities Alliance AGREEMENT

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The VCSE Healthy Communities Alliance (hereafter termed 'the Alliance') is the recognised governance structure through which the Staffordshire and Stoke-on Trent Integrated Care System (ICS), including the Integrated Care Board (ICB), Integrated Care Partnership (ICP) and Place-based Partnerships (PbPs) shall engage, consult and empower VCSE organisations and networks to be involved in our health and care system on an ongoing basis.
- 1.2 In agreement with the Alliance, the ICS may engage VCSE organisations directly or through other agreed forums, networks, meetings or such like. These recognised routes will be detailed at **Appendix A: Recognised VCSE Alliance Forums.**
- 1.3 This does not prevent individual organisations within the ICS using other routes for VCSE engagement but they shall not claim those means to be formally on behalf of the ICS.
- 1.4 The Alliance has an overarching aim to increase health equity of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Communities through community-based approaches, but may otherwise support the health and care agenda in its broadest sense.

2. Aims

- 2.1 In the short to medium term, the Alliance aims to bring together VCSE organisations and to engage with statutory health and care organisations so that they can:
 - i. Have a strong collective voice for the role of the VCSE sector
 - ii. Inform, engage, consult and empower one another in relevant health & care structures, relationships, policy and practice
 - iii. Bring VCSE sector knowledge, skills and expertise to address health inequalities
 - iv. Increase the role and influence of the VCSE sector in ICS strategic thinking and decision making
 - v. Network with one another, develop contacts, share information and best practice
 - vi. Develop working relationships between organisations and across sectors
- 2.2 Specifically, the Alliance shall provide the recognised legitimate means of both mandating and supporting individuals to act on its behalf, as Representatives, in attending and voicing VCSE perspectives and insight at formal ICS boards, steering groups and such like. See clause 9 for further details.

3. Alliance Membership

3.1 There will be two forms of Membership of the Alliance.

- i. Full Members: VCSE Organisations shall be full voting members and eligible to attend any and all business where they do not have a conflict of interest and to stand as a Chair, Vice Chair, or Representative as per clauses 7 & 9; and
- ii. Associate Members: Statutory health & care organisations who shall be invited to be active partners, but may not vote, may not stand as Chair, Vice Chair or as a Representative, and may be excluded from business where a VCSE only discussion is deemed appropriate. Exclusion shall be at the discretion of the Chair of the relevant forum.

3.2 A condition of both membership forms is to sign up to this Cooperation Agreement, including **Appendix A: Principles of Co-operation**. Sign up shall be via an electronic declaration and a central record will be held of Members by Support Staffordshire and VAST.

4. Context

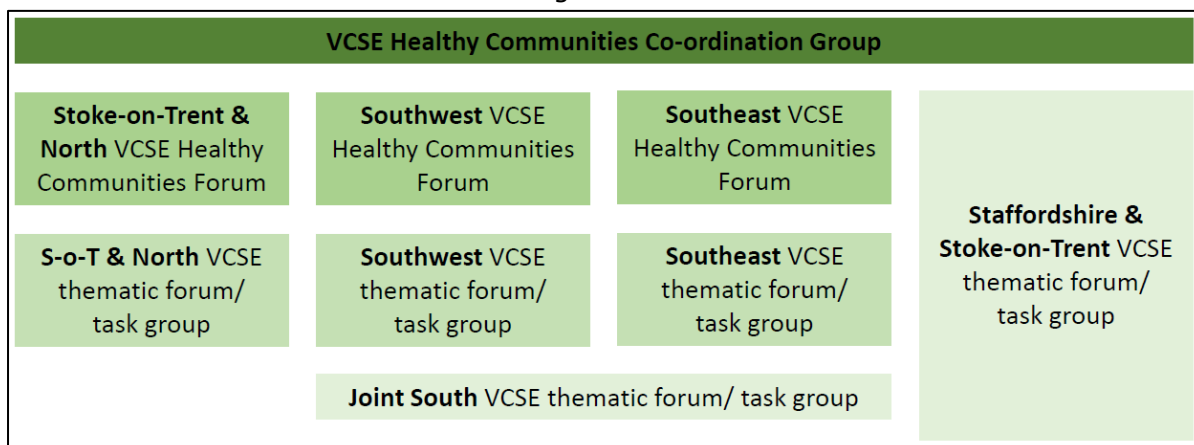
4.1 The Alliance was formed in late 2021 as a coming together of a number of pre-existing and new initiatives:

- i. The long-standing VCSE Health & Care Forum operated by Support Staffordshire to support VCSE involvement in the Sustainability & Transformation Partnership, and later the Integrated Care System, recognised a need to reshape its structure and organisation in light of the emerging PbPs.
- ii. The Stoke-on-Trent Voluntary Sector Chief Officers Group (VSCOG), operated by VAST, recognised a need to look at its geographic and thematic remit.
- iii. A Place-based group had arisen in the Southeast in response to the Covid-19 pandemic and an associated National Lottery Fund Partnerships project.
- iv. NHS England had mandated that all Integrated Care Systems should develop a VCSE Alliance by April 2022 to support systems to engage with the VCSE sector.

4.2 With a view to the NHSE mandated VCSE Alliance being VCSE sector led, Support Staffordshire and VAST commenced a development project from October 2021 – March 2022, to develop the structure and relationships outlined in this agreement, consulting with the existing groups outline above.

5. Structure

5.1 The Alliance will have the following basic structure:



- 5.2 Three local VCSE forums mirror current place arrangements:
- i. Stoke-on-Trent & North Staffordshire VCSE Healthy Communities Forum
 - ii. Southwest Staffordshire VCSE Healthy Communities Forum
 - iii. Southeast Staffordshire VCSE Healthy Communities Forum
- 5.3 The three local forums above, may act independently in regard to local relationships with their respective PbP and any local subgroups, but may not act beyond this geographic remit, and additionally are required to seek consensus and collaboration with other forums where appropriate.
- 5.4 These local forums may form local thematic or task groups as they deem appropriate. They may also form joint forums, for example across the whole of the south (6 districts).
- 5.5 System level thematic forums or task groups may be convened by joint agreement of the local forums and the co-ordination group, covering all of Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent.
- 5.6 A record shall be kept of the current recognised components of the Alliance at **Appendix B: Recognised VCSE Alliance Forums**
- 5.7 A system-level Co-ordination Group will act as the point of coordination and wherever possible it will seek subsidiarity to the local VCSE Forums for consultation, engagement or to enable actions. It will also act as the primary point of contact for the ICB and ICP.
- 5.8 It will comprise the three chairs of the local VCSE Forums, plus Support Staffordshire and VAST, as the recognised infrastructure organisations for the Health & Care VCSE sector in Staffordshire, (if different from the Chairs). The coordination group may co-opt additional members, by a simple majority vote, as deemed appropriate, which may be drawn from other recognised thematic forums or individual organisations bringing an identified expertise in knowledge or experience.

6. Meetings

- 6.1 We will meet as and when required to carry out the activities necessary to develop and deliver the purpose and aims.
- 6.2 This will be not less than 4 times per year for each of the local Forums and the Co-ordination Group. Where possible, the three local Forums will seek to coordinate their meeting timetables, to enable equitable engagement across the geography on systemwide matters.
- 6.3 Members are expected to attend meetings regularly and where possible send the same senior representative each time to ensure continuity. In exceptional circumstances a member can nominate a deputy by prior agreement with the chair. Persistent unexplained absence may be considered a breach of this agreement and lead to termination of membership.
- 6.4 Meeting agendas will always include as a minimum:
- i. Welcome, apologies and introductions
 - ii. Declarations of interests
 - iii. Action log/tracker
 - iv. Significant communications of the Alliance between meetings
 - v. Significant items for/from the Co-ordination Group

- vi. Feedback from/to thematic/task groups
- vii. Feedback from/to Representatives
- viii. Date of next meeting

7. Chairing

- 7.1 Chair persons of the three local forums will be elected from VCSE Members, by online poll, having sought nominations from the sector. This will be repeated every three years. If the Chair steps down, a new chair will be elected in a manner to be agreed by the group, but they shall step down at the end of the original three year term. A previous chair may re-stand for election. The election of a first chair shall take place within the first 6 months of the Alliance being formally recognised by the ICS, to allow members to become familiar with its operations prior to an election. In the interim, groups shall be chaired by Support Staffordshire or VAST.
- 7.2 Chair persons for the coordination group and any thematic or task groups shall be selected by the members at their first meeting and re-selected at least every three years.
- 7.3 The same will be true for a vice-chair who may act in place of the Chair when absent or in the case of a conflict of interest.
- 7.4 A role description for Forum Chairs/Vice Chairs is included at **Appendix E**.

8. Decision Making

- 8.1 Wherever possible decisions shall be made by discussion and consensus of all Members.
- 8.2 In the rare circumstances that a vote is called, which shall be at the discretion of the Chair, the quorum required for a vote to take place, shall be as follows:
 - i. Co-ordination Group: At least one representative from Staffordshire, or the Southeast or the Southwest local forum; plus at least one representative from Stoke-on-Trent, or the North local forum.
 - ii. Local and thematic forums: at least 4 VCSE Members
- 8.3 A vote shall be won by a simple majority. Voting shall be one VCSE Member, one vote. The Chair shall not have a casting vote. In the case of a tied vote the item may be further debated and a second vote taken to resolve the matter.
- 8.4 Where a decision is required urgently and a meeting can not be convened readily, we may seek views to reach consensus by email. If needed an electronic poll may be undertaken. This will be at the discretion of the chair.

9. VCSE Representatives

- 9.1 VCSE Alliance Representatives to Boards and Groups of the ICS shall be elected by the relevant forum of this Alliance and by no other means. The recognised representative role shall be recorded at **Appendix C: Recognised Representatives** which will be kept up to date and shared with all members periodically.
- 9.2 Where it is not obvious which existing forum is best placed to elect a representative this shall be determined by the coordination group.

- 9.3 When a position is created or becomes vacant, the relevant chair will notify all relevant VCSE forum members, seeking nominations by a reasonable deadline, usually not less than 3 weeks. Nominations must include as a minimum:
- Nominee details
 - Why they wish to take up the role
 - The skills, knowledge and experience they bring to the role
 - Declarations of interest relevant to the role
 - Declaration that they will abide by the Representative Guidance at **Appendix D**
- 9.4 Following the receipt of nominations, the chair shall ensure all nominations are made available to the members of the group with details of how to vote. This may be in person at a meeting or by an electronic form. The chair shall verify the vote and announce the preferred candidate/s.
- 9.5 Individuals or their organisations acting outside of Representative Guidance may be removed and replaced at the absolute discretion of the Alliance, by the group that elected them.

10.Administration and Communication

- 10.1 Administration will be undertaken by Support Staffordshire or VAST, by their agreement for any new groups
- 10.2 The relevant Chair will ensure an agenda is produced and circulated at least one week before meetings and receive requests for agenda items.
- 10.3 The Chair should ensure that notes showing key discussion points and agreed actions will be sent to all members no longer than three weeks after the meeting.
- 10.4 Outside of these meetings we will communicate by email or an agreed alternative platform.

11.Confidentiality and Managing Conflict of Interests

- 11.1 Members come together in good faith and will accordingly share information in order to develop our joint work. In general, Members should treat such information as confidential and not disclose it to those outside of the Alliance unless it is clearly for sharing or they have the Members agreement to do so.
- 11.2 Members agree that they will openly and proactively declare any potential conflicts of interests at the earliest opportunity to the Chair, at the designated point on the agenda for meetings, or immediately as conflicts arise within a meeting.
- 11.3 In light of such declaration's Members may be temporarily excluded from some or all of the relevant business, until such conflicts no longer apply.

12.Resolving problems

- 12.1 Where there is a difference or dispute within the Alliance, in the first place we will try to resolve the matter through dialogue, which may include inviting a more senior Executive or Board member (or equivalent) from the member organisation concerned, to take part.
- 12.2 If there is still no resolution then we may, by mutual agreement, seek to involve an agreed independent third party.

12.3 Such dispute and resolution will not prevent the enacting of clause 13 in the case of a breach of agreement or clause 14 in the case of confirmed misconduct.

13. Breach of agreement

13.1 If there is a breach of this cooperation agreement, upon being made aware, the relevant Chair will endeavour to resolve the matter swiftly and in writing.

13.2 The member in breach may have their membership temporarily suspended during this time, at the discretion of the relevant chair.

13.3 If the breach cannot reasonably be rectified, clause 14.3 may be applied.

14. Terminating this agreement

14.1 Members of the Alliance may terminate their membership by giving one month’s written notice to the chair of the relevant forum. The terms of this agreement remain in force during the notice period. The chair may at their discretion exclude the resigning member from inclusion during the notice period.

14.2 The Alliance may terminate a member’s membership of the Alliance or one of its forums/groups, where it is demonstrated that conduct is prejudicial to the interests of the Alliance and/or in contravention of the principles and terms contained in this agreement.

14.3 In such cases a discussion and vote shall be held by the relevant group, and a simple majority will be sufficient to terminate the membership. This may take immediate effect if so voted for. In serious cases, a local/thematic forum may recommend to the Co-ordination Group that membership is terminated for the whole Alliance. In such cases, the Co-ordination Group will consult, discuss and decide accordingly.

15. Declaration

15.1 Members will be required to sign an electronic form to commit to this agreement, giving the following details:

- | | | |
|----------|-------------------|------------------------------|
| i. Name | iii. Organisation | v. Confirmation of authority |
| ii. Role | iv. Date | |

Appendix A: Principles of Co-operation

a. Contribution, inclusion and respect

Each member is expected to contribute to the development of the Alliance using their skills, knowledge, experience, and the related time commitment. We recognise, respect and value the different assets brought by different partners and respect their right to be involved, even where we don't share all of their views.

b. Commitment to Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent communities

We are committed to acting in the best interests of communities across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent by adopting an asset-based, needs-informed, appropriate evidence approach to working with local people. We will recognise and build from the assets of local people, designing solutions with those involved, delivering support with and close to communities.

c. Openness and transparency

We will adopt the principles of openness and transparency in all aspects of our operation and communication. This means that we will share information in a timely and accurate manner; that we will raise issues and problems as soon as possible and work creatively and constructively to find a resolution and that we will raise questions and queries promptly and share knowledge and expertise. We will declare potential or actual conflicts of interests at the earliest opportunity and act in the best interests of the group in doing so.

d. Learning and sharing good and best practice

We recognise that each of us has something to give to the group and that equally we have something to get from it. We will share learning through identifying good and best practice. Each member will be encouraged to adopt best practice that they see elsewhere and to share examples widely within the group for the benefit of everyone.

e. Continuous quality improvement

We are committed to delivering high quality support and services and will work to ensure continuous quality improvement.

Appendix B: Recognised VCSE Alliance Forums

Forum/network	Brief description	Chair /VC	Support Organisation &/or Officer
VCSE Alliance Co-ordination Group	Coordination of work taking place locally. Point of engagement for ICB and ICP	Garry Jones (SuS) / Lisa Healings (VAST)	SuS/VAST
Southwest Staffordshire VCSE Healthy Communities Forum	All health and care theme, forum for consultation, engagement, and action, in accordance with this agreement	<i>Sandra Payne (SuS) Interim</i>	SuS Alison Holmes
Southeast Staffordshire VCSE Healthy Communities Forum	All health and care theme, forum for consultation, engagement, and action, in accordance with this agreement	<i>Garry Jones (SuS) interim</i>	SuS Sally Groves
Stoke-on-Trent & North Staffordshire VCSE Healthy Communities Forum	All health and care theme, forum for consultation, engagement, and action, in accordance with this agreement	<i>Charlotte Bennett (VAST) interim</i>	VAST Charlotte Bennett
Social Prescribing Advisory Group	To bring together stakeholders with an interest and commitment to developing social prescribing. With a particular reference to providers of link worker services ('prescribers') and NHS/LA stakeholders - not designed for 'prescription' providers	Garry Jones (SuS)	VAST Charlotte Bennett
VCSE Mental Health Forum – North	To bring together VCSEs with an interest in mental health and wellbeing in Stoke-on-Trent, Newcastle-under-Lyme and Staffordshire Moorlands. With particular reference to the Community Mental Health Transformation programme and wider ICB Mental Health Portfolio.	<i>Clare Jolly (SuS) interim</i>	SuS Clare Jolly
VCSE Mental Health Forum - South	To bring together VCSEs with an interest in mental health and wellbeing in South Staffordshire, Stafford District, Cannock Chase District, Lichfield District, East Staffordshire and Tamworth. With particular reference to the Community Mental Health	<i>Clare Jolly (SuS) interim</i>	SuS Clare Jolly

	Transformation programme and wider ICB Mental Health Portfolio.		
VCSE Children & Families Forum	To bring together VCSEs with an interest in children and families. With particular reference to the ICB Children's & Maternity Portfolio	<i>Clare Jolly (SuS) interim</i>	SuS Clare Jolly

Appendix C: Recognised Representatives

ICB Portfolios	Name of Representative & Organisation	Appointed or Elected? Plus, which Alliance Forum linked to?	Terms of office
Integrated Care Partnership	Garry Jones (SuS) Lisa Healings (VAST)	Appointed by the ICB	n/a
Children & Young People & Maternity	<i>Phil Pusey (SCVYS) interim</i>	Elected Children & Families Forum	TBC
Planned Care, Diagnostics & Cancer	TBC	Elected TBC	TBC
Improving Population Health	TBC	Elected TBC	TBC
Urgent & Emergency Care	<i>Sandra Payne (SuS) interim - south only</i>	Elected TBC	TBC
Mental Health, Learning Disability & Autism	<i>Charlotte Bennett (VAST) interim</i>	Mental Health Forums North and South	TBC
Primary Care	TBC	Elected TBC	TBC
End of Life, LTCs and Frailty	<i>Charlotte Bennett (VAST) interim</i>	Elected TBC	TBC

ICB Place Boards	Name of Representative & Organisation	Appointed or Elected? Plus, which Alliance Forum linked to?	Terms of office
Stoke-on-Trent	TBC	TBC	TBC
Staffordshire	TBC	TBC	TBC
Southwest Staffordshire	<i>Sandra Payne (SuS) interim</i>	Elected Southwest VCSE HC Forum	TBC
Southeast Staffordshire	<i>Garry Jones (SuS) interim</i>	Elected Southeast VCSE HC Forum	TBC

ICB Enabling Programmes / Committees	Name of Representative & Organisation	Appointed or Elected? Plus, which Alliance Forum linked to?	Terms of office
People & Workforce	Sandra Payne (SuS) Charlotte Bennett (VAST)	Appointed Alliance Co-ordination Group	2022-2025
Finance & Sustainability	Lisa Healings (VAST)	Appointed Alliance Co-ordination Group	2022-2025
People & Communities Assembly	Charlotte Bennett (VAST) Garry Jones (SuS)	Appointed Alliance Co-ordination Group <i>Nb. The P&C Assembly is open to unlimited applicants from relevant VCSE organisations</i>	2023-2026
Communications & Engagement Group (Officers)	Charlotte Bennett (VAST) Elaine Denney (SuS)	Appointed Alliance Co-ordination Group	2023-2026
Digital	TBC	Appointed Alliance Co-ordination Group	TBC
Estates	TBC	Appointed Alliance Co-ordination Group	TBC

Appendix D: Representative Guidance

D1. Purpose of Guidance

- 1.1 This guidance is to provide a clear and sustainable basis for VCSE representation in the ICS.
- 1.2 The guidance provides clarity around both underlying principles and specific mechanisms for VCSE representation, to meet the needs and ambitions of both the VCSE sector and our statutory partners, in a proportionate way.

D2. Principles

- 2.1 The VCSE Alliance has agreed to be the recognised conduit for VCSE representatives to boards and steering groups of the Integrated Care System.
- 2.2 However, the Alliance will decide whether and by whom it should be represented, in response to any specific invitations.
- 2.3 Representation will not be accepted if it is deemed tokenistic.
- 2.4 Any invitation should be proportionate to the size and scope of our sector if it is to make a reasonable and useful contribution. As such, sole representatives should usually be avoided, whilst recognising that in some smaller or specialist partnerships this may be appropriate.
- 2.5 We will usually provide both named representatives and named deputies for planned absences and emergencies, to ensure continuity of involvement.
- 2.6 Representatives should always act on behalf of the VCSE Alliance. They should reflect an inclusive cross-section of VCSE views; not solely their own organisation's perspective.
- 2.7 Representatives are expected to communicate both ways, seeking views and feeding back on their representative work.
- 2.8 If there is a conflict of interest in this regard representative should openly declare this and remove themselves from the position of influence, either temporarily or permanently.
- 2.9 Representative should act transparently and with accountability to the VCSE Alliance.

D3. VCSE Representative Roles and Capabilities

- 3.1 Representatives should carefully consider their capacity to undertake the role before being nominated. This includes both attending the relevant strategic meetings and attending the relevant Alliance meetings to gather views and provide feedback.
- 3.2 Representatives should represent the interests of and work on behalf of the Alliance membership as a whole.
- 3.3 Representatives should be proactive in consulting Alliance Members on relevant matters, seeking information and views to inform the relevant debate.

- 3.4 Representatives commit to being bound by collective decision-making where the Alliance has agreed a collective position, even where this differs from their organisational or personal view. If they are not able to articulate the collective view with professionalism, they should resign from the role.
- 3.5 In their remit as a member of an ICS strategic Board they should seek to be collaborative and non-confrontational, whilst assertively advocating VCSE sector views. This may require them to develop their knowledge of the relevant issues in their own time and to build relationships on behalf of the Alliance. They should comply with any reasonable requests of Boards such as the completion of conflicts of interest paperwork.
- 3.6 From time to time Representatives may be invited to induction, training and networking for Representatives. They should make every effort to attend and engage with such learning opportunities. Persistent non-engagement may be considered a reason to be removed from their role.

D4. Supporting Representatives

- 4.1 Alliance members should be supportive of representatives and not undermine their role by actively seeking to influence, by going around them.
- 4.2 Members should keep representatives informed of key issues or views and respond promptly to requests for information. Members should provide data and/or case studies to back up views and be willing to be named by representatives where collective positions have been agreed.
- 4.3 Members should acknowledge that representative's capacity to undertake the role will have limitations and where appropriate be willing to offer support.

D5. Statutory Partner Role

- 5.1 VCSE Alliance Members commit their valuable resource to provide strategic engagement on the understanding that statutory partners will be open to hearing and willing to act on our input.
- 5.2 In order for representation to be meaningful representatives should have the time and opportunity to gather a range of views. Clarity around agenda items, timings and meeting papers is expected to enable this.
- 5.3 Where a statutory body has concerns about the role being undertaken by a VCSE representative they should report their concerns, promptly and clearly to the VCSE Alliance Co-ordination Group Chair, so that it is empowered to act. They should not seek to impose their own sanctions, to remove the representative or to seek alternative representation outside of the Alliance.

Appendix E. Forum Chair and Vice Chair Role Description

E1. Eligibility

- 1.1 To be a forum chair you must be a full member of the relevant geographic forum. This means you must be a VCSE representative

E2. Election

- 2.1 Whether by a triennial online poll or as an interim appointment by the forum itself, only full members from VCSE organisations may cast a vote
- 2.2 One vote per organisation will be counted and the Chair will be elected by a simple majority. In the event of a tie, there will be a run-off vote between the highest candidates

E3. Responsibilities of Chairs (or vice chairs acting in their place)

- 3.1 To ensure that the business of forum meetings is conducted effectively and efficiently, and that members are enabled and encouraged to participate fully in discussions.
- 3.2 To ensure the Alliance Cooperation Agreement is followed in the conduct of business.
- 3.3 To attend the Alliance Coordination Group as a means of coordinating and aligning the geographic forum activities.
- 3.4 Where agreed, to act as an advocate or representative of your forum; and more generally as an ambassador of the VCSE Healthy Communities Alliance
- 3.5 To support the relevant Officers to develop an agenda and any supporting papers in a timely and effective way
- 3.6 To transparently and openly declare any conflicts of interests and to give way in such cases to the named Vice Chair

E4. Qualities of a Chair

- 4.1 Commitment to Alliance Purpose, Aims and Principles of Cooperation
- 4.2 Dependable, conscientious, and professional
- 4.3 Able to work as a team, with an inclusive and fair approach
- 4.4 Able to facilitate challenging conversations
- 4.5 Knowledge of relevant local systems and structures