

# COMMUNITY ACTION SUFFOLK



Strengthening the voluntary and community sector

## Strategic Plan 2017-2020

The “go to” organisation  
for the voluntary, community  
and social enterprise sector



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# Welcome from the Chair

I have great pleasure in introducing the new strategic plan for Community Action Suffolk (CAS). This document highlights some of our key developments and successes to date but more importantly, outlines our strategic direction for the next three years.

Suffolk has a diverse and active voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector with nearly 3,000 registered charities and an estimated income of £273.4million. 48% of these charities have an income of less than £10,000, which means that many are small local charities relying on volunteers. There are also many other small voluntary organisations, which are not registered charities, delivering vital services to their communities.

It is CAS's ambition to support all these organisations to be effective and sustainable. We aim to enable them to have a voice and show the positive impact their work has in their communities. This is particularly true of the smaller voluntary organisations which bind their communities together, providing local solutions for individuals to live well.

Volunteering has never been more important and CAS plays an important role in this. Having led the creation of the Suffolk Volunteering Strategy, we continue to facilitate its action plan working with partners across the Suffolk system. CAS is enabling more people to volunteer and supports organisations to improve the volunteer experience.

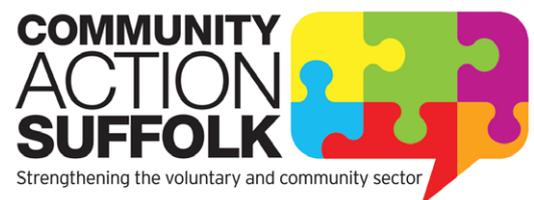
CAS continues to grow, with our membership heading towards 2,000. We have recently surveyed our members and consulted with key stakeholders to understand the challenges faced by the sector. We are responding accordingly by developing services to meet these needs.

In a time of austerity it is important that CAS fulfils its role to develop and represent the VCSE sector. We continue to champion the role of the sector in the transformation of public services, through working with partners.

We are proud to be the infrastructure body for the VCSE sector in Suffolk and look forward to making it even more vibrant and sustainable.



Steven Javes  
Chair of Trustee Board  
Community Action Suffolk



# Values

## **Independence**

We are trusted and respected, responsive to local needs and are politically neutral.  
We listen and communicate effectively and can be the voice for the sector.

## **Knowledge**

We work collectively as a team sharing our expertise and previous experience.  
We create a culture of openness and strive to learn and share our knowledge.

## **Commitment**

We work hard to achieve with passion and belief.  
We are realistic, honest and accountable always giving the best of oneself.

# Vision

Our vision is that Suffolk communities are stimulated, empowered and strengthened through an effective and sustainable voluntary and community sector.

# Mission

Our mission is to strengthen and champion community action in Suffolk by supporting the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector in its work.



# Introduction from the Chief Executive

Our Strategy for the next three years is clear and simple: CAS will firmly establish itself as the 'go to' organisation for the voluntary, community and social enterprise VCSE sector.

CAS supports organisations in Suffolk's VCSE sector to enable them to operate more effectively. We provide a voice for organisations and groups who may not otherwise be heard and represent their interests to the private and public sectors. We do this through conferences, workshops, social media and by consulting with our membership. Over the next three years we aim to grow our membership to 2,500 organisations.

Our annual CAS Awards and Celebration event recognises the work of our members and all who operate in the VCSE sector in Suffolk. For our 2017 Awards, we had a record number of nominations, telling some truly inspiring stories.

In addition, key to the support we provide for the sector, is a focus on sustainability and resilience for VCSE sector organisations. We are further developing this aspect of our work to enhance the breadth of support we offer. The introduction of new initiatives in early 2017, such as Suffolk ProHelp and specialist business support are the start of this.

Our current offer which includes various forms of organisation support, training, resources and toolkits will be enhanced by further specialisms in many areas according to the needs of the sector. We are also further developing collaboration and partnership working models for the sector to enhance sustainability and reduce duplication.

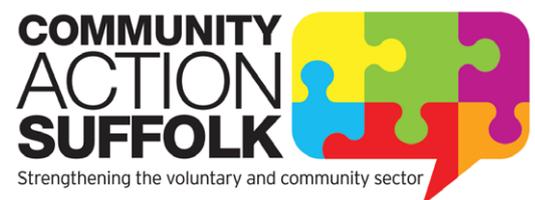
CAS actively promotes and champions volunteering. We know that almost every aspect of Suffolk life benefits and enjoys the successes of volunteering, from our sports clubs and arts organisations, our churches and community centres to our public services such as schools, hospitals and community safety. By working together, CAS will enable more people to volunteer and to benefit from volunteering, creating a better, more cohesive Suffolk for all.

CAS is developing a VCSE sector voice framework – as an infrastructure organisation, CAS cannot be the voice of the sector, however it can facilitate the voice. CAS's role is to facilitate mechanisms through which views and, on occasion, a collective voice of the sector can be heard, in ways that can influence strategic policy and decision making, based on good information and intelligence.

In terms of CAS's financial sustainability we recognise the pressure on our core grant and continue to diversify and raise income from other sources. As well as optimizing the use of our existing estate, our subsidiary businesses will grow and develop to maximise our income generation.



Christine Abraham  
Chief Executive  
Community Action Suffolk



# Our Strategic Direction

The next three years are likely to see a continuation of the unprecedented political and economic change across the UK. The prevailing climate of austerity will result in public sector cuts leading to an increase in demand services provided by the VCSE sector.

Furthermore, society faces growing challenges with an increasingly elderly population and a reduction in the proportion of working age adults.

All these challenges are particularly prevalent in Suffolk and Brexit may have a further detrimental affect on the local economy by reducing the available workforce, particularly in traditionally low pay sectors, such as agriculture and caring, as 2020 draws closer.

CAS will continue to do what we do well, supporting the VCSE sector through masterclasses, training, workshops, championing voluntary action and helping to build capacity ensuring that VCSE sector organisations have strong effective leadership and effective trustees. Recent consultation shows many VCSE sector organisations also require additional support to access professional expertise. CAS will also continue to support the sector to access this expertise by brokering relationships between providers and increasing opportunities for public, private and VCSE sectors to come together and share knowledge and best practise.

We will develop business intelligence and replicate successful ideas from other areas. This will help Suffolk charities diversify income streams, demonstrate their impact and positively influence key stakeholders to benefit the sector as a whole.

There is a huge amount to do, but we can make significant progress by ensuring the VCSE, public and private sectors all work effectively together for the benefit of the population of Suffolk and its surrounding area.



# Strategic Priorities 2017-2020 overview

## **Supporting a diverse and resilient VCSE sector to build capacity and sustainability**

- Increase our reach across the VCSE sector in Suffolk
- Deliver a range of services that help to support and develop the sector
- Create opportunities for networking, collaboration, learning and sharing (knowledge and best practice)

## **Stimulating and developing impactful community and voluntary action**

- Support and connect organisations and communities to identify needs, opportunities and local solutions
- Raise profile of volunteering and enable more people to volunteer
- Improve the Suffolk volunteer experience

## **Creating and maintaining influential, equitable and beneficial relationships between the public, business and voluntary community sector**

- Create a relationship management strategy
- Create effective communication channels to, from, and within the VCSE sector
- Increase promotion and awareness of CAS services and activities

## **Develop CAS as a sustainable and essential business in Suffolk, driven by continuous improvement and innovation**

- Develop a diverse range of funding sources
- Develop a skilled and responsive workforce
- Implement best practice in governance

# Supporting a diverse and resilient VCSE sector to build capacity and sustainability

CAS will deliver services across Suffolk to help make organisations more effective, well governed and sustainable. This will range from providing one to one support, giving information, toolkits and providing workshops and training events.

Diversification of income in the VCSE sector remains a core part of our support offer. Focusing on ensuring organisations have a sustainable funding mix, further plans are in development for ensuring the sector are aware of all opportunities available to them. This includes a new focus on the social investment and finance markets and bridging the gap between funding providers, investors and other income generation tools. Funding advice remains a key need of the sector and central to our work. CAS has worked in partnership with Suffolk's county, district and borough councils to bring a brand new funding search tool to Suffolk, "Funding 4 Suffolk". The portal was launched in June 2016 and CAS is committed to ensuring this vital funding tool is available for CAS members to access.

We will optimise the opportunities afforded by information technology in terms of reaching grass roots organisations using online toolkits, webinar, web chats and online chat. We will focus on:

- a. enabling the sector to be sustainable through contract readiness and diversification of income
- b. identifying gaps and building local VCSE sector capacity by providing, conferences, training, support and networking
- c. Expanding and developing our offer to focus on new opportunities and areas of market need such as social impact measurement and financial / strategic planning
- d. Enhance the strength and widen the opportunities available to local VCSE sector organisations by building partnerships and consortiums to win tenders and attract funds that otherwise might go to organisations based outside Suffolk.

Our offer to the sector is further enhanced by the addition of Suffolk ProHelp to CAS. Professional companies including lawyers, architects and accountants will undertake one-off projects including feasibility studies, structural surveys, marketing and business plans, legal and accountancy advice and property valuations for the VCSE sector. The guiding principle of Suffolk ProHelp is that members approach this sort of work in the same way as they would any other fee-paying customer.

In addition, we have introduced a specialist business support offer to further support the sector with specialist provision for organisation development. This includes business planning, social impact measurement, contract readiness and forming partnerships.

Further development for partnership working models is expected during 2017 following the implementation of Minding the Gap. Funded until September 2019 by the European Social Fund and Big Lottery Fund, Minding the Gap is a partnership (led by CAS) of nine partners offering bespoke support for young people in Suffolk who are furthest from the labour market and experiencing social isolation.

Providing high quality, affordable, accessible training and learning opportunities that support and equip a diverse and resilient VCSE sector to build capacity and sustainability is one of our core objectives and this service is very much valued by the sector (the overall quality of our courses is consistently marked as 'very good' or 'excellent' by over 90% of learners in their feedback).

We will grow and develop this service in line with the needs of the sector, having just transitioned our offer into an online "one stop" shop for booking and payment future developments to facilitate easy access will focus on;

- creation of new courses to meet sector needs
- developing the CAS Learning Zone. An integrated, differentiated offer for the VCSE sector. Face to face training courses will be complemented by "on demand" learning opportunities such as webinars, podcasts, video clips, interactive toolkits and online courses.

We will continue to provide a wide portfolio of IT services to community groups, charities, social enterprises and small businesses ranging from IT support, website design, website hosting, broadband, email and cloud products. These are specifically designed for the VCSE sector in terms of content and pricing and means that we are able to provide affordable IT products to organisations that otherwise wouldn't be able to afford to buy. In addition our popular DBS checking service and community oil buying are set to continue.

Our aim is to improve IT service take-up amongst small and large VCSE sector organisations so that these organisations have systems that are well supported and maintained, are protected against modern threats with vital help and advice and new IT technologies are put in place, where possible, to improve efficiency and functions within these organisations.

We also provide access to insurance policies for charities and community groups, committees and parish councils enabling them to continue with their activities, safe in the knowledge should anything happen they are well protected. This includes tailor made village hall / community building and parish council policies at competitive premiums along with additional support and advice on insurance matters (including supports with claims) to parish councils, community building committees and community groups.

Profits from insurance schemes are gifted to the main CAS charity and used to support projects.



# Stimulating and developing impactful community and voluntary action

CAS will continue to lobby and advocate on behalf of Suffolk's rural communities. CAS will collate evidence and intelligence on rural matters that we use to influence local and national policy (through ACRE) from housing, health and transport to broadband, services and fuel poverty.

CAS will provide practical help and support to rural communities throughout to enable them to plan and develop as vibrant places to live, work and visit. We will identify what local people need and the issues that are important to them. We will then champion these things with those who set policy and make decisions in the county, helping to ensure that rural Suffolk has a voice.

CAS has a principal role to identify local housing need within rural parishes by carrying out housing needs surveys and act as an independent "honest broker" working with parish councils, housing associations, local authorities and land owners to progress opportunities for affordable housing for local people in rural areas.

CAS will further develop the network of village halls and community buildings that are valuable assets in the community, in the facilities and activities they provide for the health and wellbeing of local people. We will enhance the provision of a range of information and support to ensure that those volunteers managing these assets have up to date information, skills and expertise to ensure that their vital community facilities are well managed.

CAS has secured over £250,000 to support Good Neighbour Schemes in Suffolk over the next five years. This will provide an improved and dedicated support service to the existing 29 schemes but will also enable the development of new schemes in rural parishes where social isolation for vulnerable people is a concern and the community are keen to find local solutions through local volunteering.

CAS's Suffolk Wheels 2 Work project is a scooter loan scheme for people living or working in rural areas who do not have their own transport and cannot access existing public transport. CAS will seek funding to replace its existing fleet of scooters to ensure that this valuable service enables more isolated individuals to access employment or education.



A key priority for CAS will be to enhance its current volunteering offer. CAS will ensure clear and accessible information on what volunteering is and what opportunities exist enabling as many people as possible to have the opportunity to volunteer. We will help build the capacity of organisations who involve volunteers, to develop new approaches to volunteering that make giving time easier supporting them to capture measurable outcomes and the impact of volunteering.

We will continue to campaign to increase volunteering across the county at every opportunity, facilitating the Volunteer Strategy and administering and promoting Volunteer Suffolk as the “one stop shop” for volunteering in Suffolk.

CAS will recruit to a new post of Young Leadership Development Officer which will support young people into volunteering in leadership roles within their community, as charity trustees, local council and democracy and such opportunities. We will stimulate social action by increasing youth volunteering for young people and enabling them be more engaged in their local community, matching their skills or assets with what needs to be done.

CAS will develop accredited training for people who want to volunteer and provide training for Volunteer Managers to offer an improved volunteer experience for those who give their time.

CAS will encourage Suffolk employers to develop Employee Supported Volunteering (ESV) schemes which can be a fulfilling experience for everyone. The organisation will benefit from attracting volunteers with the skills, experience and enthusiasm they need and employees can benefit too through gain new skills and experiences which can often be applicable to their role in the business they work for. CAS will develop new toolkits and guidance for ESV and share good practice through Volunteer Suffolk.

CAS will also seek to develop the V-Event Project which is unique to Suffolk, bringing together event organisers who need volunteers, and those who want to volunteer their time for events and sports in Suffolk. Over the next two years CAS will specifically focus on improving the opportunities for one-off event volunteering for those individuals who have not volunteered before or who face challenges and need support to volunteer.



# Creating and maintaining influential, equitable and beneficial relationships between the public, business and VCSE sectors

CAS will facilitate the voice of the VCSE sector by bringing together expertise and knowledge within a single point of contact and in doing so avoid duplication and simplify feedback mechanisms.

Whilst as an infrastructure organisation CAS cannot itself be the voice of the VCSE sector, we can provide a structure through which there can be a productive exchange of views and ideas based on good information. This role cannot replace the responsibility of public sector agencies to provide the resources and mechanisms through which meaningful engagement can occur, but CAS will support and facilitate engagement by:

Facilitating opportunities for dialogue on strategic and operational issues through:

- Facilitating VCSE sector Locality Forum in local councils and facilitating specialist networks on a themed basis (e.g. community buildings, health and wellbeing, safeguarding, volunteering)
- Enabling access to timely and accessible information on emerging issues through regular generalist newsletters, specialist newsletters and one off internet based surveys maximising the opportunities offered by social media.

## **Enabling representation**

CAS will work with its forum and networks to identify representatives based upon knowledge, interests and capacity and will provide support to representatives to channel information between them and the wider VCSE sector to ensure that the representatives are informed in their role and the wider VCSE sector is kept abreast of key decisions and changes.

## **Developing the capacity of the VCSE sector to engage**

CAS's work with our membership organisations will support increased engagement from across the sector. This work includes:

- Support to strengthen the capacity of smaller VCSE sector organisations – governance, volunteering, funding, networking, sharing best practice
- Two-way communications, providing information
- Promoting the impact of the VCSE sector work
- Connecting to regional and national drivers through national infrastructure organisations e.g. NCVO and ACRE
- Local influence, strategy contributions

## **Supporting the development of essential housing**

CAS will continue to offer support to rural parishes, local authority and housing association partners by undertaking housing surveys which provide evidence of need of housing, including hidden need and ensures every individual has a voice, facilitating the delivery of affordable housing in rural communities for local people.

# Develop CAS as a sustainable and essential business in Suffolk, driven by continuous improvement and innovation

## Developing a diverse range of funding sources

We appreciate the good relationships with our funders, however there are significant challenges ahead, in particular reductions in public spending have resulted in a reduction in the local authority grants and as an infrastructure charity, CAS has not been able to secure unrestricted funding from fundraising bodies.

In order to address issues around its long term sustainability CAS will review the usage of its estate, looking at how to maximise the profitability of Brightspace and the Kirkley Centre and maximise the opportunities for income growth through our subsidiaries as well as continually looking for new business opportunities and innovations.

CAS subsidiaries provide additional income: Insurance, IT, Community Buying and DBS.

- Our insurance policies provide peace of mind and the protection needed by an organisation operating in the VCSE sector, including village hall insurance and cover for parish councils
- CAS offers a suite of IT services to charities, social enterprises, businesses and individuals, including website design, IT support, broadband, website hosting, email and cloud services
- CAS can help reduce the high cost of heating oil by bringing Suffolk communities together and buying together. Not only can we lower costs and reduce heavy tanker traffic through the Suffolk countryside, we also pride ourselves in providing high quality customer service to our members
- CAS offers the new online DBS checking system at competitive prices for all organisations.

## Staff wellbeing

It is the aim of CAS to ensure that all staff feel welcome and happy within the organisation, motivating them to work effectively and acknowledging that in doing so employees are more likely to stay healthy, reducing absenteeism and sick days and supporting CAS to deliver its objectives.

CAS will, in all its efforts aspire to best practice in the management of staff wellbeing and will consider feedback from the CAS annual staff survey and the information and comment shared with one another at the our away days.



# CAS Strategy map

Ultimate aims	Supporting a diverse and resilient VCSE sector to build capacity and sustainability	Stimulating and developing impactful community and voluntary action	Creating and maintaining influential, equitable and beneficial relationships between the public, business and voluntary sector	Develop CAS as a sustainable and essential business in Suffolk, driven by continuous improvement and innovation ( <i>internal</i> )
<b>Beneficiaries</b> What must we achieve for our beneficiaries?	Support merger of small/ similar organisations Increase reach across VCSE sector in Suffolk	Effective volunteer brokerage, raising profile and improve the volunteer experience	Promote better understanding of the value of the VCSE sector to the Suffolk system	Sustainability through good management, collaboration and innovation
<b>Capacities</b> What do we need to excel at, to deliver for our beneficiaries?	Develop effective partnerships/consortia – BBO, PHT  Annual consultation Training packages for VCSE organisations	Share local knowledge through media and events  Training for volunteers Trustees finder Volunteer portal	Facilitate the voice of the sector  Marketing Partnerships and collaboration	Use and maintain the CAS CRM system  Establish adequate specialist/expertise <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff CPD</li> <li>• Trustee development and recruitment</li> </ul>
<b>Resources</b> How do we ensure we are resourced adequately?	Use resources strategically and efficiently			Grow our income <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain core funding</li> <li>• Innovative/diverse income generation</li> </ul>

“Our go to support service when in need.”

“You are there when needed!  
Even if it’s just someone to just talk over village politics!”

“I think that Community Action Suffolk does a wonderful  
job. They are so helpful, a really good organisation.  
We are so pleased to be members.”

“At a difficult time for you and every other organisation you  
support, you are doing a great job. Thank you.”

“Have belonged to CAS, previously Suffolk ACRE,  
for some years and have always felt they have a mix of  
talents to guide me and my current project  
onto greater achievements.”

“Thank you for being there for us.”

Feedback from the CAS Survey 2017

## Our funders



Community Action Suffolk. We help you help others.

Advice and services for voluntary and community organisations across Suffolk.

Registered Charity No 1150501. A company limited by guarantee and registered 08316345.

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