ISSUE TWO
FREE PUBLICATION

OUR SUFFOLK

FOR SUFFOLK'S VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR

Crisis & Change

How to navigate sector uncertainty and nurture Suffolk's community commitment



NEWS | FINANCE | ANALYSIS | LOCAL STORIES | LEADERSHIP

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Welcome

Welcome to the Autumn edition of Our Suffolk, the publication written by the voluntary sector, for the sector, with guest pieces from across our county.



Our theme this time is Change, Challenge, and Crisis as the sector navigates through an ever-changing landscape and operating environment. This issue is packed full of top tips, thought leadership, and practical support to help along the way and provide food for thought on how we test thinking, challenge convention and assumption and continue to thrive for our communities.

There's also lots of fantastic news, events and stories from the sector as well as our regular features bringing you policy updates and funding opportunities and of course our sector Movers and Shakers.

And don't forget, we have also launched 'Our Suffolk In Conversation With...' over on YouTube recently, so head over to the Our Suffolk channel, have a listen and subscribe for more in between publications.

For now, grab that cuppa, take a well-earned break and enjoy the read!

Hannah

Chief Executive, Community Action Suffolk

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News from Across Suffolk

Search is on for Next Medal Recipient

Suffolk Community Foundation has launched the latest search for unsung heroes across the county. Nominations are being encouraged for those who would make a worthy recipient of a Suffolk Medal, which would be presented next summer.

Individuals who have carried out work for the long-lasting benefit of the county and its residents, are considered to be the perfect nominees.

These might be volunteers, charity workers, educators or carers, and the only requirement is that they live in Suffolk and have been a positive influence on the county. The awards panel for the Suffolk Medal will meet in November to discuss nominees.

For more information, go to thesuffolkmedal.org



Design Expertise Helps Suffolk Community Project Take Shape

Plans for a new community space in Combs, near Stowmarket, have taken an important step forward thanks to a partnership through ProHelp. Oaks Meadow Project, a local community charity, is working towards creating a new community room where residents and groups can come together.

Through the Community Action Suffolk initiative ProHelp, the charity was connected with Nick Loomes from Plaice Design, who generously offered his professional expertise to help bring the vision to life.

Nick supported the project with an on-site meeting, consultation with local residents and the development of concept plans for the proposed building. Desiree from Oaks Meadow Project said: "The support has enabled us to move to the next stage of finalising the plans and applying for planning permission."

The partnership highlights how businesses can make a lasting difference to community organisations by sharing their professional skills, helping ambitious local projects move from ideas towards reality.



Cancer Support Suffolk's Big Quiz Raised an incredible £10,776 On The Night

The event, staged by ambassadors Simon and Kirsty Jay, was a sell-out triumph for the charity and saw a huge number of teams taking part.

Simon Jay and his parents have long been associated with running successful quizzes within the county, and this latest production can certainly be seen as another impressive effort which not only drew a terrific crowd of participants, but raised a great deal of money for an important local cause.

100 Charities Helped Through Two Decades of Generosity

The Birketts Charitable Fund has just marked 20 years of giving, with confirmation it has supported 100 charities from a £250,000 sum.

The fund was set up in 2006 in partnership with Suffolk Community Foundation.

Its primary aim is to support grassroots projects across the county, and in recent times it has made awards to the likes of Unscene Suffolk and Second Stage.

Amy Austin, chair of the Ipswich Panel, commented: "This is truly a wonderful milestone to have reached and we are so pleased to have been able to support so many fantastic local causes."

£2,000 Winter Grants to Help Suffolk Communities Thrive

Community groups in Mid Suffolk can apply for grants of up to £2,000 to help residents stay connected and active during the colder months.

Mid Suffolk District Council's Living Well in Winter programme is returning for its fourth year, supporting projects that tackle isolation, improve wellbeing and bring communities together.

From warm spaces and lunch clubs to community cafés, sports sessions and creative activities, the scheme aims to make winter more welcoming, particularly in rural communities.

Resilience?

It's not the destination for our sector



Hannah Reid is Chief Executive at Community Action Suffolk

CRISIS – A word I've become increasingly familiar with in recent months. The very word evokes negativity, and feels a bit uneasy.

I've spent much of my time recently talking about it and grappling with the balance of ensuring it isn't down-played, nor over-inflated in the context of Suffolk's voluntary sector.

Indeed there was a point earlier this year, where I'll admit, it felt like that was the only kind of question everyone wanted to ask me – "How is the sector doing?", "Are there any closures coming up we should be aware of?", "Are you worried about any organisations?", "What type of organisations are you concerned about?"... The list goes on.

But the truth is two-fold: While potentially more acute, this isn't new – national and local infrastructure organisations like CAS have been warning that the sector is facing significant challenges for many years in various reports and research, AND there are thousands of organisations and groups in Suffolk still delivering incredible services and activities in our communities and having a huge impact on people's lives.

Furthermore, not every challenge or change is a crisis, often the opposite – change can be very positive, and overcoming challenge is where the learning lies to enhance practices and delivery or even prevent what could be a crisis in future.

So this is where the 'grapple' happens – how do we ensure systems and partners understand that inaction on the key causes of crisis and closure is not an option if they want a healthy and vibrant sector supporting Suffolk's communities for years to come, while also ensuring partner and public trust doesn't decrease and that not all VCFSE organisations and groups are assumed to be on the edge of the metaphorical cliff?

To be clear, most are not.

The voluntary sector is not facing challenging operating environments alone – economic, social, technological, political and environmental changes are affecting organisations across every sector.

The particular difficulty we face is when the cost of facing them can't be found in profits or big budgets, and reliance for additional resource is on organisation reserves and hopes of cost saving, or the ever decreasing (and in a few cases, gone) surplus.

The end result can then quickly become a crisis situation and ultimately lead to service reductions and closures, increased waiting lists, job losses, and even organisation closures – and the impact this has on residents and communities can be devastating.



But we are good at this stuff!

A few years ago I wrote a piece about what I term the resilience baseline. The premise being there is a baseline for any organisation or group where we 'tick along'. No major changes, doing what we do (and doing it well), providing services, no shocks, but also, no growth.

For me, being resilient is the ability to come back up to that baseline when something happens – something goes wrong, drives us off course, unsettles the norm – the ability to 'right' our path.

Resilience is fine (and in my opinion, overall the sector has nailed it!), it's still delivering our purpose when things are tough and in those moments, it is often quite an achievement to reach; but it's not an aspiration.

It's not the action of being resilient I take issue with, it's the presumption that it is enough, that it's become the leading adjective used to describe the sector, and that resilience is sometimes seen as the ultimate achievement the sector deserves praise for.

It isn't.



The sector deserves praise for the incredible services, activities, outcomes and impact it delivers, the adaptability and flexibility it shows on a daily basis, and the passion, dedication and aspiration of those working and volunteering within it that deserves the praise.

Most of the time it is hard work, but it is fulfilling work. To know you make a difference every day is overwhelmingly positive and something many people long for from a workplace.

But we do have to be realistic as a sector – services cannot be delivered and we can't make a difference if our organisation or services close or our group folds.

The ultimate aim should always be that we aren't needed but that is an unlikely utopia, we have never been more needed and we have a responsibility to do all we can to make sure we remain and thrive.

So I will keep balancing on the metaphorical tightrope and make these 3 pleas:

1. To Suffolk's VCFSE sector – take the tips from this edition, examine your organisation health and reach out for support as early as possible if you need it;
2. To our system partners and stakeholders – do the research, hear what the sector is saying and take action wherever you can, and;
3. To all Our Suffolk readers – get involved! Volunteer, share skills, apply for VCFSE jobs, campaign, donate – the Voluntary sector is a great place to be and we'll be here for a long time to come!

A CEO's Diary: Closing a Charity with Dignity



Is the ultimate crisis scenario for a charity CEO one which finds you having to bring the organisation to a close?

Here, in her own words, **Amanda Bloomfield**, CEO of Gatehouse, tells us exactly what that feels like.

"People often ask me what it feels like to close a charity.

The truth is, most CEOs never imagine they will have to.

We spend our careers believing that, somehow, another solution will appear.

Another funder, another partnership, another project or another opportunity to keep serving the communities that rely on us.

For 40 years, Gatehouse did exactly that.

We adapted to changing governments, economic downturns, rising demand and countless funding challenges. Like many charities, we became experts at doing more with less.

Then one day, despite every effort, we reached the point where there simply wasn't another solution.

Nothing prepares you for that moment.

One of the biggest surprises wasn't making the decision to close. It was discovering how little guidance exists once that decision has been made.

Every charity is different, every governing document is different, and suddenly you're navigating legal responsibilities, financial obligations, staff welfare, volunteers, service users and trustees without a roadmap.

As CEO, I quickly realised that closing a charity isn't just an organisational process. It's an emotional one.

While everyone else is hearing the news for the first time, you've often been living with the possibility for months.

You've already explored every option, had countless difficult conversations and spent many sleepless nights wondering if there was one more thing you could have done.

Then the announcement is made.

Almost immediately, people want to help.
"Have you tried crowdfunding?"
"What about a petition?"
"Surely the council can help?"

Their suggestions come from kindness, but they are often the same ideas you've already explored many times over. They're beginning a journey that you've been travelling for months.

One lesson I have learned is that leadership can be incredibly lonely during times of closure. You carry information that others don't yet know.

You support people through their grief while managing your own. You try to remain calm when your own future has suddenly become uncertain.

Yet amid the sadness, I've also witnessed extraordinary compassion.

Staff supporting one another. Volunteers offering far more than anyone could reasonably ask. Trustees making difficult decisions with integrity. Communities expressing gratitude for decades of service.

Those moments remind you why the charity existed in the first place.

Closing a charity isn't simply about ending an organisation. It's about protecting people, honouring a legacy and ensuring that, even in its final chapter, the values that built it remain visible.



I'm still living this journey, and every week brings new lessons. Some practical, some emotional, many unexpected.

One day I hope to share the full story – of the difficult decisions, the conversations behind closed doors, the mistakes, the small victories and the realities that few people ever see.

If those experiences help another charity leader facing impossible decisions, then some good will have come from one of the hardest chapters of my career.

For now, this is simply the first page of that diary."



**Amanda Bloomfield is CEO of Suffolk charity, Gatehouse, which is closing after 40 years.*

Do you need help with a scenario your organisation is facing? Contact CAS on info@communityactionsuffolk.org.uk

Dental Appointments FREE for Suffolk Service-Users

VCFSEs are being invited to point service users toward FREE dental hygiene and dental therapy appointments, thanks to the launch of a new student-led clinic.



The fully supervised sessions are free to any resident in Suffolk, and arrived in October as part of a partnership between Lighthouse Dental Practice and the University of Suffolk.

Supervised dental hygiene and dental therapy students will be seeing patients at the central Ipswich clinic of Lighthouse Dental Practice four days a week.

With a focus on preventative dental care, the approach provides students with valuable hands-on clinical experience, while helping more people in the community access dental care and treatment.

Appointments will run between 9am and 5pm, with the practice now inviting people to register their interest and book appointments.

The practice is particularly keen to hear from teenagers and young adults who could benefit from preventive dental care, although appointments are available to other suitable patients.

The initiative arrives at a time when more and more people are experiencing difficulty in accessing dental appointments.

To find out more, check eligibility or book an appointment, contact Lighthouse Dental Practice on 01473 257379 or WhatsApp: 07727 728906.



Nick Hulme: Time to be More Vocal

Having retired from his role of CEO at East Suffolk & North Essex NHS Foundation Trust at the end of last year, Nick Hulme CBE talks to Our Suffolk about the role of the VCFSE in community healthcare.

**Pictures taken by EADT / Newsquest at Be Well Barn.*

FOR nearly five decades, Nick Hulme has been immersed in the world of the NHS.

From porter to Chief Executive, there can be little he hasn't seen, learned and experienced about the organisation he refers to as 'the UK's most precious asset'.

Throughout that intense career journey, he has worked closely with a number of the VCFSE sector's leaders, organisations and initiatives – many of whom were founded here in the county.

He is candid in his assessment of how the sector does, and should, work with and alongside the NHS provision to greater effect.

"I can see the areas which make it difficult – not least the issue of long-term commitment," he says.

"It's my view that the commissioners in the NHS have demonstrated good courage and commitment to the voluntary sector in the past, but it's not 'long term' enough to make everyone feel the projects will be sustained.

"Clearly they can't write blank cheques, and there has to be accountability, but we've got to keep seeing more working together between the NHS and the sector, because people need more than just the science and the buildings."

He points to the fact that while the NHS may be the obvious provision of the infrastructure, the voluntary sector is required for the less quantifiable outputs – those essential touches and support lines which help people keep their life on course.

"The question is always, 'not what's the matter with you, but what matters to you'."

"It's about finding the very thing that makes someone's life more supported, more positive, more understood.

"The NHS can't always provide that – but the voluntary sector can."

Take the case of Cancer Support Suffolk, the charity at which Nick – who lost his own wife to cancer – has now become a trustee.

He explains: "People may be attending the hospital for their cancer treatment, following their diagnosis, but what about the things that are really making them feel concerned, disconnected, and 'not themselves'.



**Nick Hulme is now a trustee of Cancer Support Suffolk. Historically, he has also served as chair of the Terence Higgins Trust, in addition to his various roles across the NHS. He retired from East Suffolk and North Essex Foundation Trust at the end of 2025.*

"It's a charity like Cancer Support Suffolk which is then providing the counselling, the chance to have a friendly chat over a cup of tea, the opportunity to feel part of a community, and the occasion to learn about wigs and make-up and come away feeling so much more human and heard.

"This is the voluntary sector's biggest place, but they really do need to be so much more explicit about it."

Nick believes that all too often, the voluntary sector remains unseen and misunderstood, and that it's therefore on the charities and organisations collectively, to keep ensuring that the wider community of Suffolk really do understand how they operate and what they deliver.



"If I'm honest, I do think there's a perception that local charities are a bit fluffy," he admits.

"The local VCFSE sector has to be more explicit about what it does, and, importantly – where its money comes from and goes to.

"So many people still don't get that their money leaves the county if they give to a national charity.

"It really does make me sad that there's a complete lack of awareness about that – that 80p in every pound fundraised in Suffolk leaves our region because it's presented to a national organisation.

"I'm not criticising and I understand why people feel compelled to support causes they've heard about or that they feel do great work, but we have to keep reminding businesses, communities, and people of all ages, that great work is being led by charities here in this county."

As he comes toward the end of his first year 'post NHS', and settles into his trustee role for Cancer Support Suffolk, Nick has a rallying plea to the sector: "Be explicit and be inclusive.

"I have seen from within my world of the NHS that there are far too many people not experiencing the extra support they would value during a health journey, just because they're not aware of an organisation or they don't know how it could serve them.

"It's about being more vocal in saying what you do, where the money comes from, where it goes and who can be helped. We need to ensure that we're not missing people who urgently need that voluntary sector kindness, simply because they don't know the door is there for them."

Values are at their most powerful in a crisis

By Erika Clegg



The voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise sector is facing a demanding time. Demand for services continues to rise while funding remains uncertain.

Teams are stretched, volunteers are giving what they can and leaders are expected to make difficult decisions with incomplete information. Often there is no perfect answer, only the least damaging course of action. It is precisely at times like these that values become indispensable.

When things are going well almost any organisation can appear values-led. It is easy to be compassionate when resources are plentiful, collaborative when everyone agrees and ambitious when the future feels secure. The true test comes when times are harder. Which service do you protect? Which project do you postpone? How do you explain tough decisions to staff, volunteers, beneficiaries and funders? What do you refuse to compromise, even when the pressure is intense?

Whilst these might seem to be strategic questions I'd also frame them as values questions – because if you've got the right values in place you are in a far stronger position to answer them.

We live in a world where trust is in increasingly short supply. Edelman's 2026 Trust Barometer describes this as a period of increasing insularity, in which people are becoming more selective about the organisations they support and the institutions they believe. Rather than accepting what organisations say about themselves, people increasingly expect evidence that those claims are true. Trust is no longer a given and the only way to earn it is to behave consistently, constantly.

For organisations whose very purpose is to serve people and communities, this presents both a challenge and an opportunity. In a sector where reputation, relationships and public confidence underpin everything from fundraising to volunteer recruitment, trust has become one of the most valuable assets an organisation possesses.

Organisations often put off thinking about values until they need a worthwhile exercise for strategy days or organisational away days – almost seeing them as an on-the-day team building exercise. I would argue for them to be prioritised. Values are most useful when circumstances are difficult because they provide leaders with a stable framework for making decisions.

No one can predict every challenge that lies ahead. However, if we decide the principles by which those challenges will be approached then they become much easier to navigate. When an organisation has genuine clarity about its values, difficult decisions become easier to explain because people understand the reasoning behind them. Teams may not always agree with every decision, but they are far more likely to trust a process that is visibly grounded in principles rather than feeling subjective.

This matters particularly in the VCFSE sector because the decisions leaders face are often moral as well as commercial. Balancing finite resources against infinite need, weighing one worthwhile cause against another and making choices that affect people's lives is par for the course. Values cannot remove those dilemmas, but they can help organisations navigate them with integrity and confidence.



TOP TIPS

1. Make sure your values are absolutely fit for purpose before the crisis comes
2. Use your values to guide difficult decisions: not just for you, but across the team
3. Make sure your values are true, honest and clear – not just clichés
4. Build trust through consistent behaviour that honours your stated values
5. Never compromise your values when things are going really well, or really badly!

The British Army Leadership Code expresses this relationship between values and trust particularly well. It states: "When values are declared and followed, they form the basis of trust. When they are stated and not followed, trust is broken."

That observation applies just as readily to charities, community organisations and social enterprises as it does to the armed forces. Staff notice whether leaders' decisions are a fair representation of the principles they promote as do volunteers, beneficiaries and funders. Trust grows when people see that difficult decisions continue to reflect the organisation's values, even when those decisions are unpalatable.

One of the greatest misconceptions about values is that their primary purpose is to inspire people. Inspiration certainly has its place, but their more important role is to guide behaviour. A clear values framework gives people confidence to act because they understand the principles against which decisions should be judged. It reduces uncertainty and allows people to make choices without continually seeking permission.

This is particularly useful when organisations are operating with lean teams and limited capacity. Leaders need confidence that colleagues throughout the organisation will make choices that are consistent with its purpose, character and ambitions. Well-expressed values create that confidence because they establish shared expectations about how people should behave when not operating in the glare of people's attention.

But this comes with a health warning – because not all values are equally useful.

In my work with organisations across many different sectors, I frequently encounter values expressed as familiar corporate words such as Respect, Integrity, Excellence, Collaboration and Diversity. These words are well-intentioned, but they often provide very little practical guidance because everyone interprets them differently. Ask ten people to define integrity and you are likely to receive ten perfectly reasonable, but entirely different, answers.

During a crisis, ambiguity is unhelpful. What people need is clarity.

The most effective values are expressed in language that people naturally use and immediately understand. More importantly, they describe behaviours that can actually be observed. They answer practical questions such as: What does this look like here? How do we behave when resources are under pressure? What would we never do, however difficult circumstances become?

For VCFSE organisations, values are about resilience. They protect reputation because people see the link between words and actions. They strengthen teams because colleagues understand the principles underpinning difficult decisions. They support wellbeing because people are less likely to experience working in ways that conflict with what they believe to be right. Most importantly of all, they help organisations remain recognisable to the communities they exist to serve, even as circumstances change around them.

Every organisation will experience periods of uncertainty. Strategies will evolve, funding models will change and priorities may shift. Values should not. They are the thread that runs through everything. When they are clearly expressed and consistently lived they become a source of trust and institutional resilience.

The greatest test of an organisation's values is whether they continue to shape behaviour when the pressure is greatest. Focus on being really clear about exactly what your values are and they will look after you for decades, through thick and thin. ■



Erika Clegg is author of Junk Values and helps leaders and their teams to understand the power of values for their organisation's growth and success.

Surviving Crisis: A Personal Take



FINDING yourself in the midst of a VCFSE crisis scenario can come with all sorts of personal and professional consequences.

Jo Reeder knows that all too well. Here she shares her experience and offers some sound advice.

"It's fair to say I've had a couple of really challenging experiences within the sector in recent years, and on both occasions, I was totally unprepared for what was to come.

Back in the summer of 2020, I was part of the senior leadership of Age UK Suffolk, and given the pandemic, we were all working from home. We were as busy as ever, and none of us were furloughed because there was still so much to be done.

I remember taking a call from one of the Board members, one evening and quite literally the following day there was a senior management team meeting, closely followed the next day by an all staff briefing, which the management team were expected to lead with the trustees. Within 24 hours everything changed and just a few short weeks after, the charity went into administration.



It took me completely by surprise as there had been nothing communicated about the charity's vulnerability – and all of a sudden I was being asked to handle the communications around the fallout.

I look back and realise how much I learned about seeing through a challenging time and keeping your head up when you're worried about your own reputational impact.

My next role was equally one which ended amid a crisis.

I joined Communities Together East Anglia (previously BSEVC), which had a clear opportunity for service development because of the void left by Age UK Suffolk.

For several years, there were opportunities for funding for development of new services, unfortunately, while there were some pockets of money for continuation funding, they weren't huge, and it was clear that after the Covid legacy, volunteer goodwill was dying out.

It was a perfect storm of issues really, because the system wasn't recognising core costs or the need to 'refund' good work, and I just don't feel there was strong enough financial management in place for what we were contending with.

I was called into a meeting to say that I was going to be made redundant, and I was devastated. I didn't tell anyone – not even my daughter (who worked at the same charity) – as I was asked to manage the process by the board, and it was decided initially not to let on that my own post was going.

Worse was to come, because the redundancy offer was subsequently withdrawn, and at that time it just happened that I was due to have a major operation, meaning an extended period of sick and no employment.

What the two episodes have taught me is that you have to have the right people and the right skills in place for any charity to survive – even if it's well established.

I feel strongly that there's a lack of acknowledgement in the sector that to avoid crisis, all trustees need to be thoroughly trained and accountable.

Without that, it's all too easy for volunteers to be appointed without all parties understanding consequences if the worst should happen.

Don't get me wrong, I love the sector and still think it's so amazing in what it achieves here in the county, but it's essential that organisations and individuals know what is expected of them, and that there's a robust approach for dealing with issues if the worst should happen."

My Tips for Surviving Crisis

As hard as it is, try not to become obsessed by what other people might perceive of you, when things go wrong. I lost so much energy and emotion on fearing how other people would regard me, for something that was beyond my control.

If you're asked to perform a particular function around the closure or transition of an organisation, be really clear about what your role is and what responsibility you're prepared to take. It's too easy to find yourself being unfairly tasked with an enormous burden that doesn't really sit with you.

Be true to your values. Standing firm on what you know in your heart to be right, can really help when a challenging process is feeling particularly lonely.

Don't be afraid to seek advice and find the right kind of channels to support you.

**Jo Reeder is CEO of the Suffolk Care Association and a Non-Executive Director for 21 Young Hearts CIC*

Suffolk Community Foundation:

Managing Challenges Through Honest Partnership

Hannah Bloom, Chief Executive



AT SUFFOLK Community Foundation, we know that moments of challenge and crisis can heighten the pressures charities live with every day. Rising demand, financial uncertainty and unexpected disruption can stretch even the most resilient organisations. In these times, our role is not to sweep in as saviours, but to be steady, practical partners who listen, respond and support where we can.

Many of our grants are intentionally small and targeted. They are designed to strengthen community organisations, not to rescue them from deep financial crisis. We are always honest about that. What we can offer, however, is a relationship built on openness, trust and shared understanding. When organisations feel able to speak frankly with us – about pressures, risks, or when something simply isn't going to plan – we are far better placed to help. If a project we are helping to fund isn't working, we can discuss how small changes to a programme can create a greater impact. It's never a sign of failure to say something isn't working; it's a sign of responsible leadership.

Our aim is to build relationships where charities feel confident telling us what is really happening on the ground. Honest conversations help us understand the full picture and explore practical ways forward together. They also ensure that our funding, however modest, is used in the most effective way possible.

Our recent fund, 'Stronger Suffolk' aimed at providing a three-tier model of free support to strengthen resilience, leadership and long-term sustainability is an example of how we are changing our offer to help meet the needs identified in the State of the Sector report.

Our commitment is simple: we will do what we can, with the resources we have, to support Suffolk's charities through challenging times.

East of England Co-op – Winter Community Support

From 1 November, East of England Co-op branches will be supporting the local charities they've chosen for Local Giving this winter, raising funds and awareness for their work.

Local Giving runs twice a year. This summer, stores raised over £67,000 for local charities which East of England Co-op topped up to £95,000. Throughout November, December and January, stores will be collecting donations and raising awareness, turning small acts of kindness into a big local impact.

Pop into your nearest branch to find out which cause they're supporting.

Is your group looking for funding?

East of England Co-op's Community Cares Fund also opens for applications in November. See below for details.



Summer Success for Cancer Charity

Cancer Support Suffolk has celebrated an outstanding result from its annual car show.

The Classic and Sports Cars By The Bridge event secured an incredible £37,500 in fundraising for the charity.

Hundreds of cars took part in the popular summertime activity, which featured a guest appearance from none other than Sally Traffic.

East of England COOP

Community Cares Fund Grants

Applications open in November for grants of £1000-£5000.

To find out more scan here.



Conversations Beyond Our Publication

How about extending your opportunity to absorb more conversations and content from Our Suffolk?

OUR YOUTUBE channel is becoming another place to hear directly from the people shaping Suffolk's voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise sector.

Here, we provide guests with the time and space to explore their experiences, ideas and insights in greater depth.

The material makes for a perfect 'in the ear' podcast, allowing you to take a listen as you go for a walk, nip out for your lunch break, travel to the office – or even if you're just wanting to deliberately go hunting out the voice of someone who is in your sector and community.

New YouTube content and interviews are being added regularly, with plenty more planned over the coming months.

Among the conversations to look out for is an in-depth discussion with **Hannah Reid of Community Action Suffolk** and **Hannah Bloom of Suffolk Community Foundation**, exploring the state of the sector, the challenges organisations are facing and what the future might hold.

We also speak to **Keri Bird, founder of Little Ripples**, about the realities of establishing a new charity. Keri shares some of the hurdles she has encountered, what she has learned along the way and why lived experience has been such an important part of her journey.





Then there's a conversation with **Alex Barker – presenter, coach and author – who asks whether we could all benefit from being a little more 'Pirate'.**

Following her hugely engaging keynote at the latest Community Action Suffolk conference, Alex talks in more depth about what it means to 'be more pirate', why she began working in this arena and how a little 'intelligent disobedience' might help us challenge convention and create positive change within our organisations.

Also scheduled for the coming weeks are a chat with **Sharon and Stuart Hobbs**, founders of the incredibly successful **21 Young Hearts**. They chat to Hannah Reid about their motivation to launch the organisation as a way of helping more young people with disabilities to get into work and training.

These conversations are about sharing experience as much as celebrating success. They explore the issues affecting our sector and introduce some of the people and organisations making a difference across Suffolk.

So, if you haven't visited yet, take a look at the **Our Suffolk YouTube channel**, subscribe and keep checking back as new interviews are added.

We'd love your ideas...

Is there a subject you think we should be talking about, or someone whose story we should hear? Get in touch and tell us who – or what – you'd like to see featured next.

EXPERT VOICE

Policing Your Policies



Chiara Saunders

Say the word 'policies' to any audience, and you can be sure someone groans... or thinks about it

So often they're seen as a burden, particularly on a small and stretched team trying to manage multiple tasks in the sector. And yet, they're crucial.

Policies are about setting rules for good practice, and they give confidence to funders, beneficiaries, staff, and the wider public.

They cover a vast breadth of issues about your organisation's operations – from Safeguarding to Health & Safety, and Governance Matters.

It's worth noting that there is no one set list of policies required by charities, but some become a necessity depending on the scale or undertaking of your organisation.

The most important thing is to ensure that any policy you sign up to:

- **Sets out how your charity will act in certain circumstances**
- **Reflects the work your charity does and who it works with**
- **Is workable for your charity**
- **Is accessible to those people it affects (staff/ volunteers/clients)**
- **Is followed**

There is no point having a policy that you do not, or cannot, follow and that people are unaware of. To not follow your policies accurately and appropriately, could so easily expose you in a harmful way if issues or crisis arise.

My top tips for what you should consider in respect of policies, are as follows:

- **Get advice on what policies your charity should have in place**
- **Use standard templates but ensure they are applicable**
- **Ensure the policy is one your charity can follow – be careful that you do not change wording that is key to compliance**
- **Keep your policies up to date**
- **Make your policies accessible**
- **Make sure staff and volunteers are aware of what the policies require of them**

To sum up – they are an obligation but done well they should make your life much easier in the long term.

** Chiara Saunders is Chief Executive at Citizens Advice East*
** Guidance about policies can be found on the Community Action Suffolk website*

Health Initiative Launched for County



A new programme has launched in Suffolk to raise awareness of the health impacts of air pollution.

Developed by NHS, local authority and public health partners across Suffolk and Essex, the new air pollution and health awareness programme is designed for health and care professionals and others working directly with Suffolk residents.

Advice can include practical steps such as choosing walking or cycling routes away from busy roads, reducing exposure to traffic emissions, improving ventilation at home and addressing damp and mould.

A range of supporting resources is available, including an introductory film, role-play videos, a briefing sheet and FAQs, alongside leaflets and posters that can be shared with Suffolk residents.

Professionals and organisations across Suffolk's VCFSE sector are also being encouraged to make use of the resources and help increase awareness within the communities they support.

Find out more and access the resources at Healthy Suffolk – Air Quality Advice.

Volunteering changed my life

Could it change yours?

VOLUNTEERING has changed my life for the better in ways I could never have predicted.

It started, rather unexpectedly, with running.

After taking part in the New York Marathon with a charity fundraising team in 2006, I agreed to join them again for the Berlin Marathon two years later. Having learned the hard way that marathons are considerably more enjoyable if you train properly, I joined Ipswich JAFFA Running Club.

Within a few months, I was volunteering as a course marshall at the Ipswich Half Marathon. The following year I joined the club committee – and from there, one thing led to another.

As my involvement grew, I realised something important. My many years of experience in business and leadership were just as useful in a volunteer-led organisation.

I didn't know much about running or event management when I started, but those were things I could learn. What I already had were skills and experience that I could contribute.

Over the years I became increasingly involved in organising the local Ipswich Twilight road races, eventually taking on the role of Race Director.

It can be hard work, but there is nothing quite like standing near a finish line and watching people complete something they may once have thought impossible. Whether they finish first or last, you see hands in the air, huge smiles and sometimes tears. Their pride and sense of achievement are palpable.

Knowing you played a small part in making that moment possible is an absolute joy.

Sport is just one of countless areas that depend on volunteers.

Across Suffolk, people freely give their time to charities, community groups, sports clubs, churches, village halls, environmental projects and many other organisations that simply couldn't do what they do without them.

And volunteering isn't only about what you give.

Through volunteering with several organisations, I have made friends for life, learned new skills and had opportunities I would never otherwise have had.

Volunteering can build confidence and provide valuable experience too. Skills such as teamwork, communication, organisation, leadership and customer service can all transfer into paid employment.

If you have ever thought about volunteering, perhaps start with two simple questions: What do I care about? And what could I offer?



Alison Beech

You don't necessarily need specialist knowledge, and you don't have to give huge amounts of time. Sometimes the skills we take for granted are exactly the ones an organisation needs.

Volunteering makes a huge difference to so many things that happen both nationally, and in our local communities, and our lives are richer for the hours that people give so generously and freely of their time and skills.

But volunteering isn't a one-way street. Give some of your time, skills and experience, and you may be surprised by just how much you receive in return.

It might even change your life.

Alison Beech has a number of volunteering roles:

- *Race Director Twilight 5k and 10k and Vice President of Ipswich Jaffa Running Club.*
- *Head of Family Liaison for Locate International, a charity dedicated to locating the missing and identifying the unidentified.*
- *Appropriate Adult supporting juveniles and vulnerable adults detained in police custody.*
- *Semi-retired, she now works as a coach and mentor helping leaders and entrepreneurs to support them as they grow, develop, and transform their businesses www.alisonbeech.com and www.bgcn.co.uk*



Interesting fact!

Many sporting events rely on volunteers, either exclusively, or heavily. We can all remember the wonderful Games Makers at the 2012 London Olympics and those 70,000 people carried out a total of 8 million volunteer hours! It was the biggest volunteer campaign since World War 2 and inspired a huge cross-section of the population.

The Charity Giving Hope to People And Pets



No matter how embedded in the county's VCFSE sector you are, you could be forgiven for having not known much – if anything – about the work of Our Special Friends.

LAUNCHED in 2012 by vet and passionate animal lover Bin Johnston, the West Suffolk charity has helped thousands of people through the provision of animal companionship and care.

Tell us about Our Special Friends and its ultimate goal

Essentially, we improve the quality of life for people and companion animals, by providing support in difficult times.

You could say that I bring together all my learnings about both veterinary science, wellbeing, and human desire for companionship.

What's a great example of that in action?

It varies. We might get one of our dog walkers to attend someone's home and take a beloved pet on a long walk because the owner is no longer as mobile or is currently convalescing.

We might take an animal into the home of someone who has Parkinson's or similar, and spend time with them so that they can have contact with the companion and experience the sense of affection or support.

Or it might be that we actually find a new animal for someone because they're dealing with grief and are ready to have a pet to love as part of their healing.

What inspired you to launch Our Special Friends?

I am trained as a vet and have always had an interest in bereavement due to personal life experience.

I was teaching the veterinary profession and the animal welfare sector about grief and supporting people before, during, and after loss due to euthanasia or relinquishment.

Then, 14 years ago I realised that I was having really profound conversations in the community with people who were nowhere near a vet clinic or rehoming centre.

I started looking and supporting people locally and found a whole range of pet-related issues that could be supported.

The vision hasn't changed; it's developed, and the massive welfare gap for both people and pets has become obvious.

Why is the bond between people and their pets so important, particularly during periods of illness, bereavement or loneliness?

There are decades of peer-reviewed, published evidence that they help human health and wellbeing, and they can be the only supportive relationship and protective factor keeping people well, keeping them connected and able to cope.

We can't afford to ignore these vital relationships when there's a crisis in social care, mental health, and the NHS.

I'm aware of research that says having a dog or a cat can save the NHS 2.45 billion a year, due to a reduction in visits to the doctor.

How vital are volunteers to your work?

We simply would not exist as a charity without our vital volunteer community.

We are so grateful that they can gift their time. Ideally,







they can drive and have experience of pets, but it's not essential.

Having availability that's regular, ideally happy to be using WhatsApp and email, but again it's not essential.

On what level and in what type of role can Our Special Friends provide a volunteering option for someone?

We have a range of roles from helping in the office with admin to being in our Transport team, helping when pets need to get to the vets or when medication needs to be picked up for an owner that can't do it themselves.

They could walk a dog on a rota with others, or be on our visiting team. They could talk to community groups, or represent us at meetings.

We always need more fosterers too, who step in for example when someone has to go into hospital and leave their pet for a period.

How are you finding the charity landscape right now?

It's tough. Really tough.

The VCFSE sector urgently needs unrestricted core multiyear funding, rather than just new projects or equipment. Far too many funding bodies don't support core costs.

I would hope that there is an opportunity to form a coalition to attract sustainable funding for integrated collaborative preventative care but the reality is that we are all doing our best in a very difficult funding climate.

Alongside this, and specific to the challenges presenting themselves to us as a charity, are that the cost of living crisis is causing more pressures (some people unable to continue to feed their pets or meet urgent vet fees), and also that there are just many more complex cases across health and social care.

That means more people potentially in isolation or in intolerable situations – often without the right services knowing and the right solutions being found.

We want to help wherever we can, but those people need to be identified, and awareness of us needs to be greater.

Looking ahead, what are your hopes for Our Special Friends?

I want us to be sustainable and to be around to continue to provide our valuable animal companion support.

I'd like us to increase the sector capacity to support the pet-related issues that we are finding. ■

How can people get in touch if they would like to volunteer?

https://ourspecialfriends.org/

Email office@ourspecialfriends.org

Phone 01284 247077

Charities, Risk and Avoiding the Incident Pit

How to reduce risk and build resilience to avoid full-blown crises

WHEN does a crisis begin?

It's a question worth asking because crises rarely begin at the moment we recognise them.

I remember learning about the 'incident pit' model while training to dive.

As an incident develops, it becomes progressively harder to recover. The further you slide into the pit, the steeper the sides become and the harder it is to return to 'normal'. Clearly that's far from ideal when underwater, and I think it's a model we can use to think about charity leadership and crisis management as well.

Fundamentally, crisis management starts long before a crisis occurs. Understanding, looking for and acting in response to early warning signs all help. In the current challenging operating environment, charities need to become more agile and responsive, with plans in place before problems arise.



Dr Clare Mills diving in Bermuda

CFG's work on risk management provides a useful starting point. Effective leaders understand that not all risks are equal. Some can be prevented, while others arise from strategic choices or external events beyond our control. The key is creating an organisation that understands risk, discusses it openly and responds quickly when warning signs emerge.

So how do we spot those warning signs that mean we might be starting to slide towards the incident pit?

Like divers, we are surrounded by information. The challenge is identifying patterns and connecting indicators before they become problems.

Cashflow is often the earliest indicator that something is changing. Reviewing forecasts, income performance and expenditure assumptions regularly can reveal emerging pressures before they become crises.

Timely information matters. The longer leaders wait for management accounts, cashflow reports or operational data, the less useful that information becomes in supporting effective decisions.

But financial indicators are only part of the story. Staff and organisational culture can provide equally valuable warning signs. How are your staff feeling, and how's your culture? Is staff engagement rising or falling? Is your staff turnover stable? Is recruitment proving harder than usual? How are sickness levels and annual leave use looking?

Other potential indicators that a charity may be moving towards crisis include reliance on reserves, reputational concerns, safeguarding issues, banking difficulties and overreliance on a small range of funding sources.

Spotting these warning signs is only half the challenge, however.

The important question is what happens next.

Trustees play a critical role.

Effective boards don't simply review risks; they interrogate them. Trustees are ultimately responsible for ensuring risks are identified, assessed and managed appropriately.

Good governance can mean the difference between thriving, surviving and failure. Boards should regularly challenge assumptions, ask difficult questions and seek evidence that risks are being monitored and mitigated.

Finding time for strategic thinking can feel impossible when leaders are juggling multiple priorities. But even an hour spent exploring different scenarios can be invaluable.

With your trustees or leadership team, consider questions such as:

What if a major funder withdrew?

What if demand increased by 30%?

What if inflation or employment costs rose further?

What if a key contract was lost?

Working through scenarios helps identify vulnerabilities and think through potential responses before a crisis develops.

Charity leaders should also remember they are not alone. Trustees, peer networks and sector bodies such as CFG, ACEVO and Community Action Suffolk can provide valuable support when challenges emerge.

The most resilient charities are not those that avoid challenges altogether, but those that identify risks early, plan for uncertainty and have boards willing to engage openly with difficult decisions.

That resilience pays off when a crisis develops because we cannot always avoid the incident pit. But the earlier we recognise the warning signs and act on them, the less likely we are to find ourselves at the bottom looking for a way out.



**Dr Clare Mills is Co-CEO of Charity Finance Group.*





Are School Governors the 'Invisible Volunteers'?

by Anne East, Chair of Governors at All Saints' CEVC Primary School, Lawshall



I'VE BEEN a school governor for over a decade. It's a role I'm proud of, but one that looks increasingly unsustainable as a long-term model.

Around 230,000* people currently serve as governors and trustees, making us one of the largest volunteer groups in England and Wales. Between us, we dedicate around 35 million hours* each year to supporting schools.

Our governing body has been lucky. We've maintained a healthy stream of volunteers, and our combination of skills has helped us build a team with genuine depth and commitment. But settling into a governance role takes time, and increased work commitments mean we've lost promising new governors before they've found their feet.

Recent findings from the National Governance Association (NGA) underline this struggle, with 66%** of schools agreeing that governor recruitment was 'difficult'

In reality, it feels more impossible than trying to trap water in a sieve.

This matters more than most people realise. School governors are the unseen backbone of education in England, providing strategic oversight and supporting school leaders so that every child has the chance to reach their full potential.

On a personal level, the role has been more rewarding than I ever expected. Seeing the work schools do up close and witnessing the dedication of school leaders, teachers and support staff is a privilege. Professionally, it's pushed me to develop skills and confidence I never thought I'd have.

But just how long can schools rely on this support? For families juggling long working hours and navigating rising living costs, and for grandparents taking on extra caring responsibilities, voluntary governance feels too big an ask.

School governance rarely makes headlines. It is neither exciting enough nor controversial, it just ticks along as debates about curriculum, funding, SEND and school standards dominate the conversation. Despite this, it's a role filled with opportunity, giving individuals a chance to support their communities and helping to ensure our children get the very best start to their education." ■

To rise to the challenge, find out more at Govern Suffolk or contact Anne about vacancies at All Saints' on a.east@allsaintsprimary.org

* https://www.nga.org.uk/media/hapcarbb/nga-case-for-gov-report-jan-2026-web-aw.pdf

** https://www.nga.org.uk/media/assfzsfo/nga-annual-gov-survey-20250710.pdf

MOVERS & SHAKERS

AUTUMN 2026



Heidi Franklin is now Director of Corporate Services at Leading Lives.

She's worked in both the public and private sector, and also founded an outdoor health and education business.



James Kindred has taken up a role as a board member for Knowing Works CIC.

Founder of Big Drop Brewing Co and a successful brand strategist, he also curated the Ipswich.love brand and often delivers talks about his own neurodiversity experiences.



Karen Moy has joined Ace Anglia as its Chief Executive.

She has a strong track record of leadership roles in the voluntary sector, and most recently had been at Combat 2 Coffee.



Nick Hulme, formerly CEO at ESNEFT, is now a trustee for Cancer Support Suffolk.

You can read much more about Nick's career and his thoughts on the voluntary sector working with and alongside healthcare, inside this publication on pages 8 and 9.



Gavin Evans is the recently appointed CEO at Green Light Trust.

He has been a Chief Executive for a number of other organisations, including Legacy Youth Zone in Croydon, and, on an interim basis, Manchester Youth Zone.

Ormiston Families has welcomed Ian White as its new Chair of Trustees. So too, has Community Action Suffolk.

Ian is known to many in the region as Chief Executive of Becketts Investment Management Group, and has also been Chair of Suffolk Mind.



In recent weeks, Cancer Support Suffolk has appointed a number of people to roles across its staff and ambassador positions.

Claire Staddon is now working as its Chief Operating Officer, while those taking up ambassador roles include Dave Courteen, Kara Foster, Paul Ager, Joe Garnham and Gina Long.

The Art of Good Governance:

Are you following the blueprint for being the ideal trustee?

Kevin Ward has been Chair of Community Action Suffolk since 2019 and holds a number of roles in support of local charities. Here, he shares why effective governance isn't about getting involved in the day-to-day running of an organisation, but rather to provide support, challenge and accountability at the right time.



**Kevin Ward has been Chair of trustees for Community Action Suffolk since 2019. He is also ambassador for Cancer Support Suffolk and was recently announced as Vice Chair of Suffolk MIND.*

Photo Credit: Suffolk Directory

WHAT does good Governance look like?

I think if you ask 10 business Directors or Trustees this question you'll inevitably get 10 very different answers.

Some may give very complex and detailed answers, especially if they're thinking about charities and Not for Profit (Nfp) organisations specifically.

I tend to favour a rather more straightforward approach, putting common sense front and centre.

First, a critical point: know the boundaries.

A board has employed the CEO because they believe that person is the best person for the job.

They've tasked them with running the organisation and building the right team to deliver excellence.

Therefore, a trustee shouldn't try to cross that boundary to step into operational matters in general.

Inevitably, there may be projects where help is requested, and the Chair may have a bit more involvement, but a Trustee is absolutely not 'operational'.

Second, a strong and effective board will have a variety of people, ideally with a diverse group of individuals from different backgrounds and experiences.

At Community Action Suffolk, we've been acutely aware of this and have a blend of business skills within the team, and a mix of those who come from experiences across charity and volunteering or private industry and public sector.

This works well for us as there is relevant experience on the board to help with most challenges that may arise where the leadership ask for support, but everyone on the board is willing to pull on their own knowledge, skills and background to ask challenging questions or offer positive recognition.

None of them are afraid to ask questions or check their understanding in a meeting and that is vitally important.

Third, with those boundaries in mind, how the board work with the leadership and wider team is important.

Workers in the charities tend to love seeing the Trustees. Getting a bit involved and showing an interest, offering congratulations on a great job is a terrific thing to do. Observe work and ask really good questions at every opportunity.

The Chair/CEO relationship can be a great example.

This person has been appointed as they were considered the best person for the job. They will still want support and it is lonely at the top, so being there to chat, bounce ideas around and give guidance where requested is key for the Chair.

There may be times where legally the Chair and board need to make a decision, but the CEO should be that trusted person to, in turn, guide the board. It's a two-way relationship.

Fourth – and this is where the responsibilities hit home – if you do have a problem in the organisation, including a CEO who isn't performing, then the board will be in a position where they have to take action.

Providing room to operate doesn't mean the board is excused from responsibility and legally that responsibility is high. The one time the board may need to get more involved is if issues are recognised. If there are problems with the CEO, either in their performance or possibly in the functioning of staff supported by the CEO, the board may need to take action.

An organisation can't afford to 'carry' a department lead who is not performing well, and equally, if there are welfare related concerns, such as safeguarding issues, the board may again have to become involved. This doesn't mean going out and doing things you are not qualified to do, but it does mean advice and expertise should be sought and engaged to help resolve the situation.

In summary – do not be at all afraid to become a trustee, enjoy the fact you're giving back and learning something new and adding great value, but absolutely take your responsibilities seriously and get as involved as appropriate.

Just be aware of the boundaries and stay well within your remit, for the benefit of all. ■



DSC Closure Sparks Sector Concern

Charity leaders and influencers are continuing to digest news of the sudden closure of the Directory of Social Change.



IT WAS announced earlier in October that DSC had appointed an insolvency practitioner, following 50 years of supporting charities, community groups and fundraisers.

In making the statement, the organisation's chair and chief executive referenced financial pressures facing the sector and said it was 'devastated' by its position.

The announcement has naturally prompted further concern for infrastructure organisations supporting the sector, while at the same time highlighting the importance of accessible funding advice, training and organisational support.

Our Suffolk will continue to share updates regarding the closure of DSC and similar organisations in the VCFSE space.

Meanwhile, we welcome your comments and contributions on what you feel this says about the landscape, and what you are most hoping for to aid your organisation's resilience as we head into 2027.

Please do email our team with your thoughts.

Crisis, Change and the Cost of Silence



by Deborah Watson

I DON'T envisage a crisis.

We've not faced a major issue of crisis proportions in 25 successful years.

We're acutely aware of what a rare crisis would look like for us – and we have that in hand.



You know what I'm going to tell you.

I've heard all of these before... and many besides.

But here's the thing I've learned, and that I spend a lot of time conveying to clients when we discuss communications and reputation – change is often a crisis hiding in plain sight.

What do I mean by that?

Well, crisis isn't about 10 journalists standing at the doorstep of your charity or social enterprise, or chasing your CEO down the street for a comment as he tries to take his child to the school gate.

It could be, but it's not typical.

Reputational risk often happens far more quietly, sparked by something which doesn't immediately cause an entire exec team or trustee board to be reaching for the crisis-response guide (if indeed there is one).

Think about a sudden loss of funding, a really difficult organisational decision, a leadership appointment that goes wrong, or the inability to sustain a particular service which has stood at the heart of your offer.

You might argue these are operational problems or issues to be solved. But how soon do they become a reputational problem?

This is exactly why you'll always hear the likes of myself saying that communications must be in the conversation from the start of sticky decision-making, not as the 'response to' an issue you've decided to direct a certain way.

At the very time you're facing that employee matter, the now obvious funding landscape, or the debate about regrettably shutting the door on a resource you know your community loved – well then that's where you need to be asking yourself 'how are we going to communicate this?'.

Trust is a major factor for organisations in the VCFSE landscape. That's not to say it's not an issue for every corporate or entrepreneur too, but across charities and social enterprises of any scale or scope, you're often supporting people at vulnerable times, asking for and allocating funds from various individual and wider sources, and, importantly, you're probably being passionately served by volunteers who believe in you.

With that in mind, your behaviour and the way you articulate yourself in times of change and challenge, can ultimately be just as acutely felt as the decision you choose to make.

By making sure communications is weaved into the agenda of the decision making, you're doing everything possible to ensure your staff, trustees, supporters, volunteers – and yes, journalists too – feel that what lands with them is coming from a place of honesty and respect.

When I'm brought into a room at this time (being grateful for the leader who says 'yes, we absolutely need communications to have a seat at this strategic table'), I'm usually the one who wants to throw the challenge into the room and ask this awkward but necessary question:

"What are you hoping that nobody asks?".

There's inevitably going to be one or two really uncomfortable and 'feared' queries which might come your way from clients, staff or media, but these are exactly where that reputation risk sits, and it's why your communications is vital to avoid a broadening crisis.

And of course, as much as 'what' you choose to say, there's a matter of when.

So many times I find myself called into organisations where something has taken on the face and shape of a crisis, because a vacuum was left in what was communicated, and to whom.

It's natural that when you're leading a charity or any structured organisation which is so reliant on being trusted and being accountable, you'll be focusing on not wanting to reveal your cards until you are absolute 110% certain about your next steps and on your ability to answer every question fully and frankly without reproach.

But that's not reality.

People get curious in the case of an information vacuum. Things get spotted. Staff talk. A stray social media post makes reference to something they've noticed is no longer happening. The jigsaw pieces begin to be put together – and people make up their own mind.

It's in cases like this that fallout can be even worse than having said something somewhat uncomfortable early on.

By this stage, you're looking like you've deliberately avoided being transparent. Then having to resurrect trust and confidence to any degree is always going to be more of a challenge.

As a leader of a VCFSE, you already know all too well that leadership isn't avoiding making the tough calls or confronting the difficult questions, so don't fall into the trap of being evasive and letting the information vacuum develop when change or crisis looks to be coming your way.

A simple 'here's what we know now….', can and does go a long way – and it certainly feels like more of a leadership action.

Remember too, that the more you are conditioned to accepting that sometimes, difficult things happen in organisations and their work, and that they need preparing for, then the better equipped you and your teams will be.

Communications should never be regarded as simply your tool for 'reactive' cheerleading about your success, but a critical thread which tells every audience about what you stand for, why, and how committed you are to your central cause.

5 Questions Before You Press Send in a Crisis

STOP. THINK. Before you push out that first piece of communication, ask these questions:

WHO needs to hear about this first and which are my various audiences?

WHAT will this feel like to the recipients of the information and what might they assume from anything missing?

WHERE should this be sent (think platforms and mediums of delivery)?

WHY might I subsequently receive further questions?

WHEN ais this landing and have I considered the cascade of delivery and its timing?

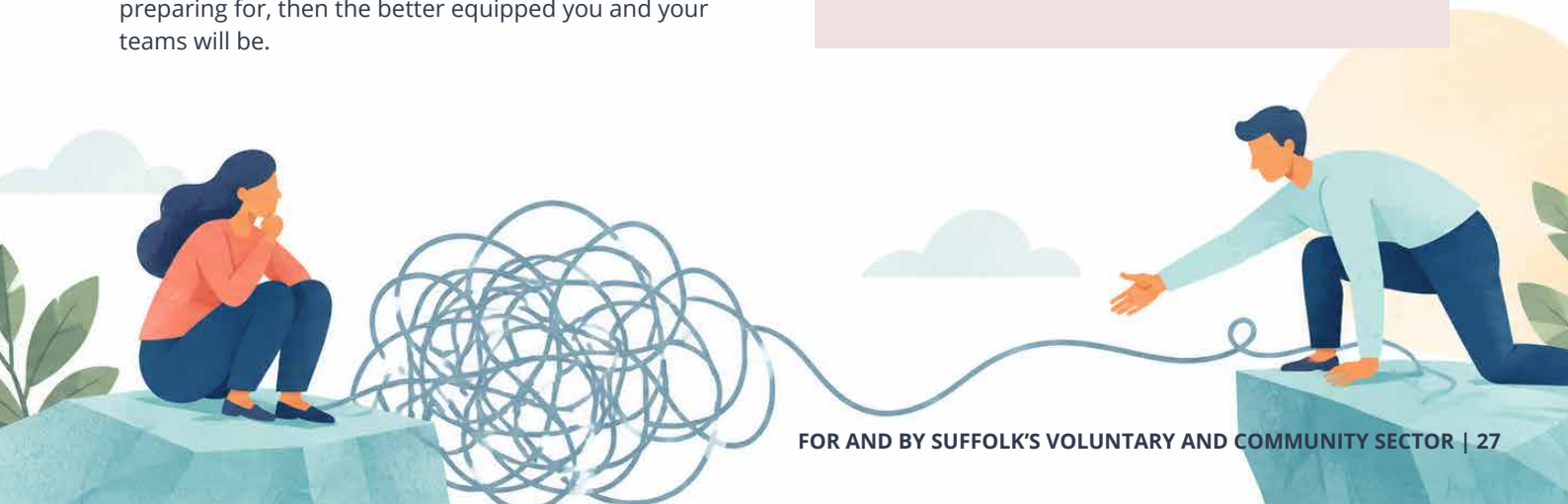
Deborah Watson is a communications and engagement specialist.

Contact her at deborah@lexiaagency.co.uk or 07974 359001

Fancy a Communications Pressure-test?

If your organisation is facing a significant change or difficult announcement, I'm opening five complimentary Before You Press Send – Crisis & Change Communications Check-ups for Suffolk VCFSE leaders between now and the end of January 2027.

Bring the issue, and we'll look at the stakeholders, potential reputational risks and the communication decisions you need to make before you press send.



LOOKING AHEAD...
Your Sector Diary for Suffolk

Here's a quick summary of some of the forthcoming awareness days, major sector related events, and key dates we think you might want to have in your diary.

East Suffolk Community Partnerships Forum
Thursday 22 October

9am – 2pm at Woodbridge School

Charity Casino Night
Saturday 24 October

In aid of Brave Futures, taking place at Suffolk Food Hall.

Tickets £60 per head

Destash Sale
Saturday 24 October

By Cake and Revolution WI for St Elizabeth Hospice.

10am – 1pm at Scout Hall, Kesgrave



Halloween Charity Party Night
Friday 30 October

At The Halberd Inn, Ipswich for Mind and Suffolk Animal Rescue.

Standard tickets £15

Understanding Trustee Roles and Responsibilities
Tuesday 3 November

Online training course led by Community Action Suffolk.

10am – 2:30pm, £45

Suffolk People First Conference
Friday 6 November

Organised by Ace Anglia.

10:30am – 2:30pm at Kesgrave Community Centre

Quiz Night for 21 Young Hearts
Saturday 7 November

7pm – 10pm at 1st Martlesham Scout Hut.

£10 per ticket includes buffet and raffle ticket

Trustees Week
9–13 November

https://trusteesweek.org/

Mistletoe Ball
Saturday 21 November

In aid of Cancer Support Suffolk, held at Venue 16. Three-course meal included.

Tables of 10 available at £700

Woodland Trust Tree Pack Giveaway
Thursday 26 November

10am – 3pm at Stowmarket Road, Stonham Aspal.

ABBA Night for 21 Young Hearts
Saturday 16 January

7pm – 10pm at 1st Martlesham Scout Hut.

£15 per ticket includes buffet and raffle

The Big Quiz for Business – Autism Anglia
Thursday 11 March 2027

5pm for 6pm Kick-off at JobServe Community Stadium, Colchester United FC. Bar open all night.

Tickets £29 and Teams of up to 8



Little Ripples Launches Special Library to Inform Children

SUFFOLK charity Little Ripples has begun building a library of books to help children and families talk about cancer.



To kickstart the initiative, the charity Give a Book has generously donated 20 appropriate books.

Each of the titles available in the library are aimed at children and young people who have someone close to them with a cancer diagnosis.

The books cover topics such as explaining a diagnosis, hair loss, managing worry and coping with change.

All of the recommended titles will be listed on www.littleripplesuk.org.uk

Keri Bird, Founder and CEO of Little Ripples said: "Books can help children find words for things that are hard to say out loud.

"We're grateful to Give a Book for this donation, which gives us a strong start."

Anyone who would like to donate a book can contact hello@littleripplesuk.org.uk.

Compass Group Proves Power of ESV



STAFF from Compass Group have helped give a timely pre-winter boost to the Grow With Us community garden in Ipswich.

As part of Community Action Suffolk's Employer Supported Volunteering Programme, the team tackled some of the garden's toughest seasonal jobs, including turning, sieving and bagging homemade compost, weeding and spreading wood chippings along pathways.

Grow With Us have praised the team's enthusiasm and positivity, saying their support had provided a much-needed lift after an exceptionally busy year.

Compass even contributed some greatly appreciated coffee and doughnuts to keep everyone going.

ESV activities such as this are a great example of how businesses can make a real difference to local community projects, bringing people together, sharing skills and giving hardworking volunteer teams a welcome helping hand.

SUPPLIERS DIRECTORY

AZETS
Accountants | Helen Rumsey
www.azets.co.uk

AFFINITY PR
PR Coaching | Helen Oldfield
www.affinityprcoaching.co.uk

AMS BUSINESS CONSULTANTS
Business Strategy | Andy Skinner
www.amsbusinessconsultants.co.uk

ANDREW LAWS ASSOCIATES / YESEO
SEO Internet Marketing | Andrew Laws
www.andrewlaws.com

BCR-INFINITY ARCHITECTS
Architects | Alan Wilkinson
www.bcr-infinityarchitects.co.uk

BECKETTS
Investment Management | Ian White
www.beckettinvest.com

CONATUS
Business Consultants | Kevin Ward
www.conatusfinancing.solutions

EDRM
Architects | Richard MacRae
www.edrm.co.uk

LARKING GOWEN
Accountants | Giles Kerkham / Sophie Curle
www.larking-gowen.co.uk

LEXIA MEDIA – DEBBIE WATSON
PR, Crisis Communication & Interim Comms Leadership
www.lexiaagency.co.uk

LOUISE ALEXANDER
Accountants | Louise Alexander
www.linkedin.com/in/louise-alexander-04246814

MACKMAN GROUP
PR & Marketing | Paul Mackman
www.mackmangroup.co.uk

MAD HR
HR Specialists | Liz Owers
www.mad-hr.co.uk

MCTEAR WILLIAMS & WOOD
Insolvency / Business Rescue | Gary Rupping / Scott Earrey
www.mw-w.com

PAUL WESTON
Architect | Paul Weston
www.paulwestonarchitect.co.uk

PLAICE
Architects | Nick Loomes
www.plaicemaking.net

SKYBRIDGE RECRUITMENT & COACHING
Coaching / Recruitment | Beverley Gedge
www.skybridgerecruitment.co.uk

NEXT ISSUE

Meeting the demands of 2027:

Our Suffolk provides expert insight, guidance and anecdotal evidence to help you navigate the year ahead.

- **Reflections from sector leaders on the last 12 months of the VCFSE world**
- **Who's changing role within Suffolk?**
- **New events, openings and opportunities**



Contact our editorial team to contribute: oursuffolk@communityactionsuffolk.org.uk

OUR SUFFOLK

Marketplace

Our regular Marketplace section allows organisations and individuals to share their own 'asks' and also to offer skills and services.

Please do let our editorial team know if you've something you urgently need, as we can also reference this on our social channels in between publications. Email us with your 'ask' or 'offer' to feature in the next issue.

A Gentle Ask...



Can you donate?

With Christmas balls and fundraisers coming up in the coming months, a number of charities are in need of more prizes for their event raffles and auctions.

Do you have items you could easily donate, or a service which could be 'gifted'? Please do get in touch with organisations to offer your suggested item or skill – or let us know so we can promote to others.

A Willing Offer...

Run the London Marathon?

A number of charities in the county now have spaces available if you are interested in running the London Marathon.

If indeed you consider it a 'generous offer' to give you a spot to go and run an exhausting 26.2 miles, then please do turn to a good cause in our region and make sure you're wearing one of their names on the big day.

Contact charities directly to find out more.

Communications Audit

Our Suffolk's editor, Deborah Watson is happy to offer a limited overview communications audit for a small number of local VCFSE organisations who may be keen to understand what their future strategy should be.

She can specifically look at crisis aspects, or at issues around preparedness for internal and employee communication requirements.

Contact her at her consultancy, **deborah@lexiaagency.co.uk**

Charity Marks Two Decades of Changing Lives



Ipswich-based ActivLives has been celebrating its 20th anniversary.

The organisation has had great success across the community in offering inclusive and accessible exercise, sport and nature programmes. Speaking recently at the charity's AGM, CEO Julie Stokes told how ActivLives has 46 weekly sessions, alongside a range of projects and services supporting some of the most vulnerable and marginalised people.

The charity had started as a two-year funded local strategic partnership project.

It was in 2012 that it became a fully fledged charity by the name of ActivLives.

POLICY UPDATES

Take a look at a selection of some of the sector policies currently receiving updates and amends.



Minister Appointed for Sector

Vicky Foxcroft has been named the new Civil Society Minister. In recent weeks, she has said: "Civil society plays a vital role in strengthening communities and delivering essential services, and I look forward to working constructively with the sector to ensure its voice is heard."

Charity Sector Risk Assessment 2026

The Charity Commission has produced a high-level picture of the risks facing the sector now or in the future. This is intended to help trustees in their role of good governance.

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/charity-sector-risk-assessment-2026

Through the Roof: The case for investing in the energy efficiency of community buildings

Community buildings play a vital role in bringing people together, but many are ageing, poorly maintained and increasingly expensive to run.

For organisations already facing financial pressures, poor energy efficiency can threaten their ability to keep buildings open and continue delivering vital services.

https://www.groundwork.org.uk/through-the-roof-vcse-report/

'Some charities will always rely on grants' impact economy researchers say

Researchers mapping out the different types of organisations that make up the impact economy have said that some charities are and should remain funded wholly or mainly by grants.

New Philanthropy Capital (NPC) and Social Investment Business's Designing the right finance for the right organisations follows an earlier report looking at the total attributed by self regulated impact-led businesses.

https://www.civilsociety.co.uk/news/some-charities-will-always-rely-on-grants-impact-economy-researchers-say.html

Equality Act 2010: Code of Practice for services, public functions and associations, 2026

The Equality and Human Rights Commission's updated Code of Practice for services, public functions and associations has come into force across Great Britain.
The underlying legal duty to make reasonable adjustments hasn't changed, but the revised Code reinforces an important point that Organisations should consider barriers BEFORE disabled people encounter them, not wait until somebody struggles or complains.

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/equality-act-2010-code-of-practice-for-services-public-functions-and-associations-2026

Banking admin takes up 12 million hours of charity time each year

Charities across the UK are collectively spending an estimated 12 million hours every year on banking administration, according to Charity Banking Report 2026, published by the Charity Finance Group (CFG).

https://cfg.org.uk/news/banking_administration_takes_up_12_million_hours_of_charity_time_each_year

Civil society groups respond to government's social value procurement changes

Sector bodies have responded to the government's plans to change how social value weighting is applied to public procurement.

The Cabinet Office has revealed plans to remove the social value weighting from all contracts under £1m while increasing the score to 20% for tenders £5m or more.

https://www.civilsociety.co.uk/news/civil-society-groups-respond-to-governments-social-value-procurement-changes.html

VCSEs: A guide to working with government

The expertise of charities, public service mutuals and social enterprises means they are often ideally placed to help create compassionate, responsive and efficient public services.

In recognition of this, a guide has been created to help bring more charities and social enterprises into public sector supply chains.

https://www.gov.uk/guidance/vcses-a-guide-to-working-with-government

Major funder plans to reduce burden of application processes after feedback

The Paul Hamlyn Foundation (PHF) has said it aims to reduce the burden of its application processes following comprehensive feedback from both grantees and declined applicants.

https://www.civilsociety.co.uk/news/major-funder-plans-to-reduce-burden-of-application-processes-after-feedback.html

£259,832 Lottery Boost Brings Double Celebration for Future Female Society

WHAT better way for a Suffolk charity to mark a 10 year milestone, than with news of a major lottery boost?

At its recent anniversary celebration event, Future Female Society announced it had secured a funding award of an incredible £259,832 from The National Lottery Community Fund.

The sum will support the organisation's work over the next three years, helping more women and girls across Suffolk build confidence, improve wellbeing, develop skills and create new connections and opportunities.

The announcement was a highlight of a vibrant community celebration bringing together the women, families, volunteers and partners who have helped shape Future Female Society over the past decade.

Presented in partnership with Suffolk Archives, with support from Suffolk County Council and the Suffolk Community Fund, the event featured a multicultural fashion show and community choir.

Kim Trotter, Founder and CEO of Future Female Society, said:

"We are absolutely thrilled.

"The National Lottery Community Fund will make a huge difference to what we are able to offer over the next three years.

"It means we can continue projects that are already making a difference while also creating new opportunities for women, girls, migrant and refugee women and the wider community.

Ten years ago, we could not have imagined the journey we would take. What started with a desire to create opportunities and bring women together has grown into a community of women, girls, families, volunteers and partners who continue to inspire us every day."



Wendy, a Future Female Society member, takes to the catwalk in traditional Afghan dress during the multicultural fashion show.

Photo: Rae Shirley.



Could you be Trust's Next Chair?

Felixstowe's Landguard Charitable Trust is searching for its next Chair.

The organisation oversees the work of partners across its 46 acre site and is particularly keen to find a proactive networker and great communicator who can take the Trust on its next chapter.

A significant heritage and wildlife charity in our region, it has launched the search for a new Chair by requesting any interested parties to get in touch via email with a CV and covering letter.

Contact paulgrant@landguardtrust.org.uk

Funding Opportunities

Trying to source a funding pot for a new project? Keen to find out about new and revised funds made available across the county? Here's our round-up of some of the available opportunities for Suffolk-based groups and organisations.



Stronger Suffolk VCFSE Support Programme

Free organisational support
Suffolk VCFSE sector

Developed in response to the State of the Sector report, this programme offers free, coordinated support to strengthen leadership, governance, resilience and sustainability across Suffolk's voluntary sector. Led by Suffolk Community Foundation in partnership with Suffolk Funders Network, Community Action Suffolk and Cranfield Trust, support is tailored to organisational needs.

https://suffolkcf.org.uk/grants/stronger-suffolk/

Sir Jules Thorn Charitable Trust – Ann Rylands Small Donations

Grants up to £5,000
Applications open year-round

Unrestricted and project grants for charities supporting people experiencing physical or mental ill health, disabilities, and their families or carers. Typical awards range from £2,500 to £3,000.

https://julesthorntrust.org.uk/programmes/ann-rylands-small-donations/

Green Hall Foundation

Will Charitable Trust

Grants of £10,000–£20,000 | Deadline: 20 November 2026

Funding for charities supporting people with sight loss, learning disabilities or cancer, including residential care, supported living and specialist services. Project grants and some unrestricted core funding are available. Organisations with substantial free reserves or limited delivery experience are unlikely to succeed.

https://willcharitabletrust.org.uk/

Albert Gubay Charitable Foundation

Grants of £5,000–£100,000
December 2026 funding round

Primarily capital funding for projects addressing homelessness, domestic abuse, modern slavery, rehabilitation, disability, terminal illness and other community needs.

Also supports medical research, faith-based outreach and disability sport. Applicants are generally advised to request no more than 50% of project costs. The December round considers eligible costs from January 2027.

https://www.albertgubayfoundation.org/

Music for All – Community Music Funding

Instruments, equipment or grants up to £1,500
Deadline: 30 November 2026

Supporting schools and community groups in disadvantaged or marginalised areas to increase access to music. Awards include guitars, ukuleles, other instruments and software, plus grants of up to £1,500 for early-years music projects.

https://www.musicforall.org.uk/awards-overview/

Cash4Clubs – Flutter Entertainment

Grants up to £2,000
Deadline: 1 January 2027

Funding for community sports clubs engaging adults aged 18 and over. Grants can support equipment, facilities, coaching and club sustainability.

Priority is given to projects increasing participation among under-represented groups, tackling isolation and improving community wellbeing.

https://cash4clubs.org/

HR Perspective on Crisis



**Louise Bradshaw is Associate Director of People & Cultural Development at Community Action Suffolk*

When organisations face difficult times, leaders are often focused on finances, operations and risk.

However, the way people are led, supported and communicated with can have a significant impact on how successfully an organisation navigates a crisis.

How staff, volunteers and stakeholders are treated during periods of uncertainty can shape trust, resilience and confidence long after the immediate crisis has passed.

While every situation is different, the following priorities can help organisations remain resilient, compliant and focused on what matters most:



Communicate early, honestly and regularly



Prioritise staff wellbeing and psychological safety



Activate and regularly review business continuity plans



Create space for questions, concerns and feedback



Support managers so they can support their teams



Ensure legal compliance and maintain good employment practices



Make decisions fairly, consistently and transparently



Start planning for recovery and rebuilding from day one

OUR SUFFOLK

SCAN TO GO TO OUR YOUTUBE CHANNEL

The conversation is just getting started.

More voices. More conversations. More insight.

In 2027 and beyond, Our Suffolk is going further.

We're bringing you closer to the people, ideas and issues shaping Suffolk's VCFSE sector.

- **Podcasts that get people talking**
- **YouTube conversations with the voices shaping our sector**
- **Live discussions and events**
- **More insight and analysis**

And that's just the beginning.
Your sector. Your stories. Your voice.



OUR SUFFOLK **Be Part of the Conversation**

Email: oursuffolk@communityactionsuffolk.org.uk