



Supporting community action by enabling local  
voluntary groups to make a positive difference.

Interim Strategy 2020 - 2021

## CONTENTS

### Page

3	Summary
4	Introduction
5	Context
5	MSVA Today
6	Current Strategic objectives
11	Annex A: External Factors influencing MSVA in a post Covid world

## SUMMARY

MSVA's Vision is for a strong voluntary sector which meets the needs of our communities in Mid Sussex, and our Mission is to support community action by enabling local voluntary groups to make a positive difference.

Reflecting the above, we have reviewed our strategy in the context of Covid -19 and agreed to continue to focus on the five key objectives highlighted in earlier versions of this plan between 2020 and 2021:

- Objective 1 – Provide support to emerging and established groups to enable them to meet the needs of their communities
- Objective 2 – promote the value and impact of volunteering
- Objective 3 – be an empowering voice for the voluntary sector
- Objective 4 – Remain an effective organisation with strong governance and financial sustainability
- Objective 5 – Assist member organisations to network with and support each other and work together for their beneficiaries

However, their delivery will be impacted by the challenges of Covid 19 and our own and the sector's, evolution. In particular we anticipate changes to

- our member groups
- our funding
- our accommodation and IT provision
- our links with the 'Alliance'
- our governance: new Trustees and a new Risk Register
- our profile: its maintenance and further development.

The key elements for delivering our strategy over 2020-21 will focus on these changes.

## INTRODUCTION

This updated strategy is being prepared while the COVID Pandemic continues to affect this country to a major extent, and which will impact on MSVA and its activities and services in the short and medium term. This document is intended to provide a concise account of our strategy for all interested and relevant parties - Trustees, staff, member groups, local authorities and other stakeholders.

It is also intended to be a living document and as key driver to our operations, and their assessment, over 2020/21.

The document is divided into three broad sections: a discussion of the MSVA context, a review of the current MSVA position and a detailed description of our five key strategic objectives with the intended actions to deliver each one. The document concludes with an Annex on factors influencing MSVA in a post Covid world.

## CONTEXT

### Our Background

As a result of the decision by Horsham District Council to take infrastructure service support in-house from April 2018, the charity was renamed **Mid Sussex Voluntary Action** since it was no longer financed to cover the Horsham area. MSVA currently employs 6 part-time staff and supports approximately 400 voluntary and community organisations.

Whilst the purpose of this short-term strategic plan is to set a strategic direction for the future, it is also important to put into context the organisational achievements and development to date which includes:

- Our staff and Trustee team has demonstrated a distinctive and pro-active approach to a team-working ethos, showing resilience and commitment in the face of major uncertainties and changes;
- We have maintained and strengthened mutually supportive relationships with our local authorities; they continue to be engaged with and supportive of our work;
- We are in the process of reviewing our volunteer service and are planning to recruit a specialist worker in the field.
- We are promoting a self-help culture among our member groups by providing training, up-to-date information, advice, factsheets and templates on our website, social media and in e-bulletins.
- One of the unexpected outcomes of Covid has been the increased ability to communicate with our groups online by Zoom and Google, including setting up forums, training courses and general support.
- We continue to refresh our publicity material, including targeting the business community.

- We regularly seek feedback from those member groups that we have supported.

### Our Funding

Our Trustees have a duty to ensure the sustainability of MSVA particularly as our services currently depend largely on core funding.

MSVA will continue to match services to available funding, prioritising programmes so that they serve our voluntary and community organisations in the best way possible within our budget and seek to raise funds from other sources for development activities and projects not included in core funding.

The context of our funding is as follows.

- In the current financial year 20/21 our principal funding has come from our local authority statutory funders, topped up by generous grants from a number of other sources including Sussex Community Foundation, Mid Sussex District Council's Expanded Retail Grant, National Lottery, Burgess Hill Town Council, East Grinstead Town Council and Sussex Police to name but a few. With the loss of income from the hire of our Community Room, together with its rental bill these grants have enabled us to avoid making a substantial loss.
- The outlook for 21/22 is less rosy. While our statutory funding should continue unchanged for a third year, it is quite possible that local authority budgets will be significantly reduced to take account of their unplanned expenditure on Covid. We await the outcome.
- As unfortunately all our grants in the current year were 'one offs', our budget therefore is likely to show a potential loss despite our efforts to make savings, particularly on accommodation costs. We will vacate our main office in the New Year, and have put the Community Room on the market, although we will still be liable for it until 2022.

## **MSVA TODAY**

### Our Role

Mid Sussex Voluntary Action (MSVA) supports voluntary and community organisations across the Mid Sussex district area. These organisations are essential to the wellbeing of Mid Sussex residents as they provide front line support to some of the most vulnerable residents in the area. This includes the elderly, disabled, children and young people, lone parents, refugees and asylum seekers and other marginalised people.

However, voluntary groups are often unfamiliar with the range of legal, financial and regulatory requirements governing charities. Many groups are volunteer-led with limited or no income, and often need assistance in identifying demand for their services and how best to deliver these services. Many are unaware of the range of funding sources and of the existence of pro-bono or inexpensive

specialist assistance available to charities. Furthermore, some are inexperienced in recruiting staff and volunteers.

MSVA is the leading organisation operating in the Mid Sussex District area that gives information, advice, and assistance on all these issues.

It provides a one-stop shop to emerging and established voluntary and community groups. It helps voluntary and community groups to become more effective, sustainable and focussed and to deliver their service for the maximum benefit of local people.

### The Current Environment

The afterburn of Covid and impact of Brexit will be with us for several years- public health implications, economic effects, impact on society / community and CVOs for example. All this and more will make medium to long term strategic planning and development for MSVA during the next few years difficult if not impossible. The way forward may be to develop a more tactical rather than a strategic approach to the role of MSVA, based on constant tracking of the changing environments that are likely to affect MSVA and its membership. A summary of these external influences is included as an annex to this document

Among the challenges faced by our local groups today, MSVA recognises the following:

- Difficulty in obtaining funding for core activities – there is an expectation by funders that groups become self-sustaining;
- Escalating demand for services putting additional pressure on limited resources;
- The increasing complexity of charity legislation and regulations governing voluntary organisations;
- The need for organisations to analyse their service objectively, identify gaps in their activities and spot opportunities for developing new projects.

### Our challenges

In order to support voluntary sector organisations and empower them to achieve and contribute to their full potential so that they meet the changing needs of local people, we must be able to deliver services to them at the highest level, and the programmes and services we offer must compete in today's and tomorrow's competitive environment.

In addition, as an organisation we are facing challenges that we must overcome in order to safeguard our sustainability and so that we can deliver a high quality service to local voluntary organisations now and in the years ahead. These include:

- Maintaining a database system and website enabling MSVA to collect, store and analyse information about the local voluntary sector and its changing needs, and making materials available directly to our groups at all times;
- Planning in an uncertain environment and ensuring we are flexible and robust to manage change and continue to deliver our services;
- Prioritising our activities to best address the different requirements of our member groups;
- Ensuring we attract and retain members through continuing dialogue with voluntary groups and through effective promotion of our services.

### Our Vision, Mission and Strategy

*Vision:* A strong voluntary sector which meets the needs of our communities in Mid Sussex.

*Mission:* Supporting community action by enabling local voluntary groups to make a positive difference.

Reflecting the above, the strategy set out in this document aims to meet the needs of local voluntary and community groups in the short term.

We intend to continue to focus on the five key objectives highlighted earlier between 2020 and 2021:

1. Provide support to emerging and established groups to enable them to meet the needs of their communities;
2. Promote the value and impact of volunteering;
3. Be an empowering voice for the voluntary sector;
4. Continue to develop as an effective organisation with strong governance and financial sustainability.
5. Assist member organisations to network with and support each other and work together for their beneficiaries

The next sections describe in detail how we plan to deliver these key objectives.

## **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES**

### **Objective 1**

**Provide support to emerging and established groups to enable them to meet the needs of their communities.**

To achieve this, we will:

- Provide information and guidance on the application of legal requirements and guidance taking account of Covid.
- Collect and disseminate information and updates relevant to local voluntary sector groups, via the MSVA website, social media, and regular e-bulletin;
- Provide a high-quality programme of accessible and affordable training workshops, using on-line methods when appropriate.
- Provide support to member groups through 1:1, mutual support and networking;
- Seek to provide subsidised resource and room hire to our members – Covid restrictions and available resources permitting.
- Develop and expand our membership in line with the above.
- Continue to undertake research (subject to funding) to improve our understanding of changing community requirements, and help local voluntary and community organisations to meet these requirements

### **Objective 2**

**Promote the value and impact of volunteering.**

To achieve this, we will:

- Continue to identify, develop and promote new and existing opportunities, referring potential volunteers and monitoring the success of referrals and placements.
- Support organisations involving volunteers with information, training and advice to enable them to observe best volunteer recruitment and management practices;
- Work with member groups to raise awareness of and report on the contribution volunteers make to the local community and to promote the value and benefits of volunteering.
- Further intensify this work as MSVA has been fortunate in securing funding to recruit a volunteer co-ordinator on a part-time basis for a year.

### **Objective 3**

#### **Be an empowering voice for the voluntary sector.**

To achieve this, we will:

- Listen to our member groups and keep statutory bodies informed of the strengths and needs of the sector, and how the sector can help to deliver statutory sector objectives;
- Listen to statutory bodies and help voluntary and community groups to understand statutory sector requirements and the opportunities available for the sector;
- Participate (either at staff or trustee level) in relevant county and local partnerships, networks and forums representing the interests of the voluntary sector, resources permitting;
- Engage in and facilitate cross sector partnerships for example with the local business sector as well as with public sector organisations;
- Where possible influence local policy decisions through the development of local relationships;
- Maintain, and seek to extend, our media and influencing activity to ensure that MSVA is seen as the champion of the local voluntary sector.

### **Objective 4**

#### **Continue to develop as an effective organisation with strong governance and financial sustainability.**

##### **Governance and infrastructure**

- We will continue to develop as a dynamic organisation with a forward-looking Trustee Board delivering expertise and skill aligned to current and future activities;
- We will comply with the requirements of the Charity Commission Regulations, Information Commissioner's Office and Fund Raising Standards Board; ensuring that we have all necessary policies and procedures in place and that our governance practice is exemplary;
- Ensure that we have an effective organisation structure that defines how activities are directed towards the delivery of our strategic goals and outcomes. This includes the need to recruit new trustees with appropriate skills.
- Use our strategy as a key driver for our operations, regularly reviewing progress and undertaking an annual review of the Organisation's strategy and producing an annual Business Plan which sets out how we will achieve our objectives;
- Ensure we have a robust process to monitor and evaluate all programmes and activities to demonstrate the effectiveness and impact of our work through data collection and case studies.

## **Finance/Fund Development**

- Develop a fundraising strategy to maintain our financial strength by investigating all areas of income generation available to us.

## **Objective 5**

### **Assist member organisations to network with and support each other and work together for their beneficiaries**

- Assist member organisations to effectively apply Covid requirements in their work whilst maintaining their effectiveness.
- Assist member organisations to network and support each other at a time when demand for their services increase and financial support may be reducing. This may result in some mergers.
- Increase our interaction with the business sector to support its commitment to community support.

## **ANNEX A – FACTORS INFLUENCING MSVA IN THE POST COVID WORLD**

### **1. Local Factors:**

- Higher levels of unemployment in our area are likely, due generally to Covid and Brexit and specifically to the partial demise of Gatwick. This could result in an increase in volunteers.
- However, the confidence of older and other vulnerable people to re-engage with the community may not improve.
- Changes in the balance of power between central and local government and accompanying changes in the latter's structures may be introduced. This could well have an impact on the voluntary sector generally and Voluntary Action groups in particular. Possible realignment of the West Sussex Alliance, the grouping of Borough/District Voluntary Aid committees (VACs) to fit in with any new Local Government structures may be necessary. Funding of MSVA and partners through the Alliance may become unstable and uncertain.
- Increasing use of internet based public information (ie Test and Trace), on line banking etc could disenfranchise older and vulnerable people.

## 2. Infrastructure Factors

- There could be an increase in demand for housing to rent and to buy, arising from an exodus from London, because of office workers' unwillingness to commute daily and encouragement to work from home. Rented housing could be in short supply as the Covid induced economic situation results in decreased investment in the sector. The reduced profitability of rented housing will likely lead to increased demand for social housing (this is currently in chronic short supply in the area).
- There will be increasing demand for infrastructure development - roads and water, health facilities for example this will place more strain on already stretched Central and Local Government finances.
- The likely increase in population from London will result in the demand for more educational and related resources at a time when pressure on finance is severe. The ability of local government to provide family social work support, sports facilities and youth clubs for example will be increasingly challenged.
- There may be a continuing increase in economic migrants and asylum seekers due to the combination of conflict in, for example, Africa and the Middle East plus climate change in the longer term
- MSVA and its partner agencies may be able to alleviate some of the consequences of the examples given above on some of the poorer, disabled, older and isolated people in the area by its work with voluntary and community based groups.