Rutland

Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy

2024-2028

Image by Vicky Adams from Pixabay

Introduction

In my year as High Sheriff of Rutland I met many incredible people from across our vibrant voluntary and community sector (VCS). The sector's continued success is vital for the quality of life of our residents. Volunteers support social services, health, legal and council services; provide leisure activities; support young people and older people; run support groups for people in need; and much more.

As organisations responsible for state-provided services face increasing complexity, growing demand for services, and reductions in resources, the VCS can play an essential role in helping people live well and solve problems together.

Through engagement with VCS organisations across the county, a group of representatives from the sector, in conjunction with Rutland County Council (RCC), has developed this voluntary sector strategy. The strategy sets out a pathway to a sustainable, needs-led sector that collaborates with local partners to meet the changing needs of the county.

If you would like to send us your feedback on the strategy or get involved with our ongoing work, please contact us at cdo@citizensadvicerutland.org.uk
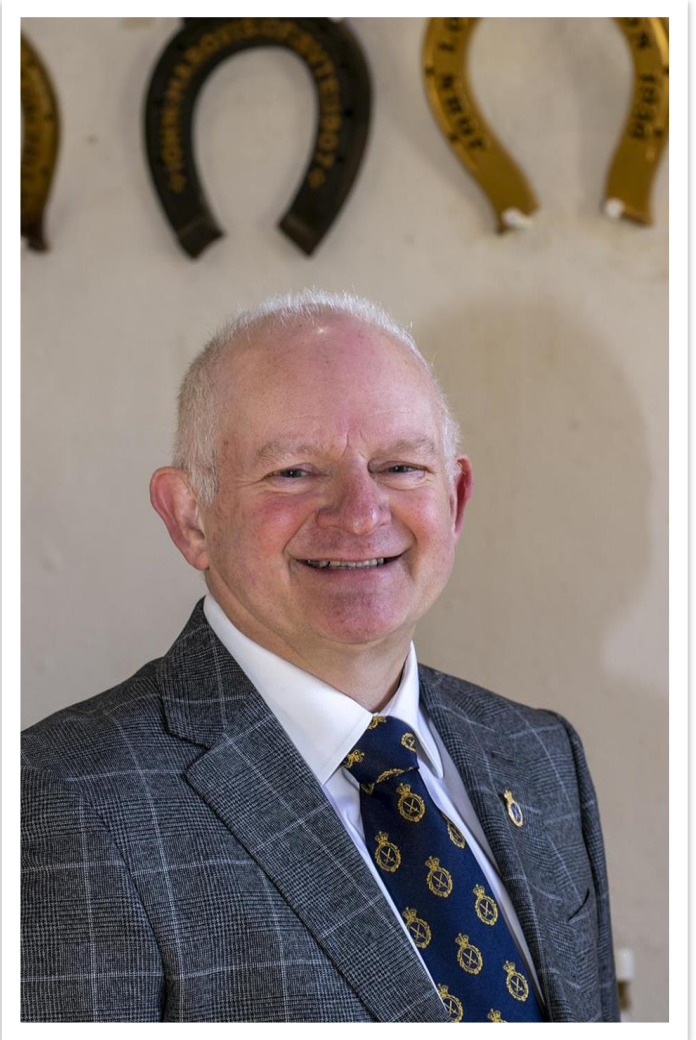
Geoff Thompson, December 2023

Image by Clarke PR and Media

What the term 'VCS' covers

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We are using the term Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) to mean independent, voluntary and community groups or organisations formed to improve the quality of life for themselves and/or fellow citizens in Rutland.

These include registered charities, voluntary organisations, community groups, housing associations, sports clubs, youth groups and faith groups involved in social action.

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Background

In 2023, Rutland County Council commissioned Citizens Advice Rutland, who have worked with Change Agents UK on the project, to develop a VCS Strategy.

A **Steering Group** of representatives from the voluntary and community sector and Rutland County Council led on development.

The project team engaged with VCS organisations county-wide through a **survey** and **in-depth discussions.**

We looked at:
o What a successful sector looks like.
o The issues affecting the sector.
o What action can be taken to address these issues.

Alongside this, we conducted a **Rutland data review** to identify issues relevant to Rutland's population that are pertinent to the VCS now and into the future.

Sector research

215 people from **165** organisations took part

Our vision

Through our engagement work with the sector to identify "What makes a strong, effective VCS?" we shaped an overall **Vision** for the sector and pinpointed **4 Key Strategic Goals**.

> **Our Vision is for a vibrant and thriving voluntary sector that improves the quality of life for the people of Rutland.**

Key strategic goals

An effective voluntary sector that:

Meets the needs of Rutland's people:

- The services and activities people want and need.

- Available in accessible locations.

- Well publicised in multiple formats.

Is sustainable

- Adequately funded.

- Appropriately skilled volunteers and staff.

Maximises its potential

- Networking and collaboration are facilitated.

- There is sharing of knowledge, skills and resources.

Has a voice and influence

- Organisations build effective relationships.

- The sector is listened to, appreciated and recognised.

About Rutland

The work of the VCS should be guided by the place and the needs of its people. We carried out the **Rutland Data Review** using sources including the **2021 Census** to identify data relevant to the work of the VCS in the county.

About Rutland

Demographics

There is a higher proportion of older people than the national average and this is increasing.

There are fewer young people and people from ethnic minorities.

Transport

Bus and train services are limited. Some villages have no public transport so accessing services within and beyond the county is hard for people without access to a vehicle.

Reaching communities

VCS organisations need to be able to reach and engage with communities:

- By being based within them.
- Through outreach work or
- By exploring alternative communication methods.

Social isolation

Social isolation is a significant issue connected to rurality and transport issues.

The risk of loneliness varies considerably between areas of the county and isn't only an issue for older people.
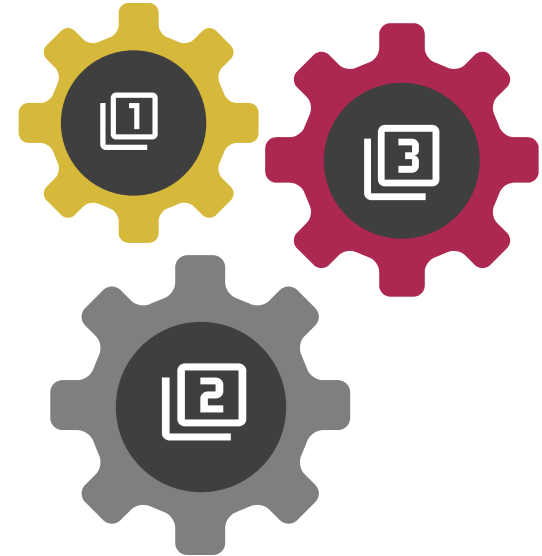
Deprivation

The county is perceived to be wealthy but there is deprivation. This is reflected by the rising demand for services such as provision of debt advice and food bank services.

Geography

Many communities are rural and population density is low.

Links to the full research findings and recommendations are at the end of this document.

Make-up of the sector

The VCS is by its nature diverse. Our sector research identified two *main* types of groups - '**Social groups**' and '**Support groups**' - with differing priorities.

Social groups

- Provide primarily social, sporting, cultural / art or other hobby activities.
- Generally composed of members and funded through membership fees / donations. They may supplement this income by seeking small pots of funding.
- Often small and locally based.
- Priorities are finding a venue and recruiting members / volunteers / trustees.
- Wellbeing is an important '*by-product*' of their activities, especially in rural areas where social isolation can be a problem.

Support groups

- Set up to provide a service to people and/or for the environment.
- May be larger, regional or national organisations or smaller, local groups and some have paid staff.
- Priorities are:
  - Being visible to potential beneficiaries.
  - Accessing funding.
  - Finding, recruiting and training trustees and volunteers.
  - Networking and having a voice.
  - Being recognised for their work.

Challenges

The biggest challenges facing **communities** in Rutland

The biggest challenges facing **VCS organisations** in Rutland
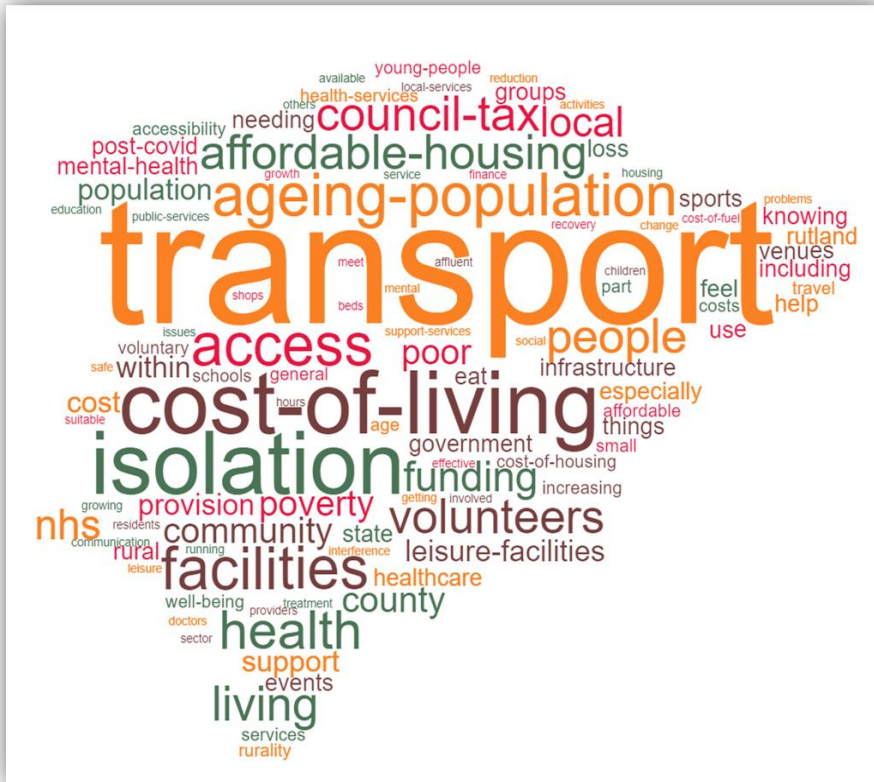
Word clouds generated from responses to the VCS Survey, links to the full research findings are at the end of this document.

What the sector needs

Continued support

To reach their full potential, VCS organisations need continued support to:

- Build relationships with each other.
- Access funding.
- Recruit and train volunteers and trustees.
- Celebrate what they and their volunteers do.
- Have a voice and be heard by funders and other partners.
- Meet increasing demand from the statutory sector.

Resources and funding

Most VCS organisations need access to:

- Adequate, accessible funding.
- Accessible office space and venues.
- Skilled volunteers, trustees and staff.

Better transport and connections

Improved transport in the county would:

- Help people to access VCS services, support and activities.
- Provide the connectivity needed for the VCS to combat social isolation and loneliness.

Better communication

Improved communication is needed:

- Between VCS organisations.
- To let people in Rutland know what the VCS can offer.
- Between the sector and local authorities / funding bodies.
- Through creating and maintaining a directory of VCS organisations.

Evidence based planning

Decisions based on data that:

- Build VCS capacity for the Rutland demographic.
- Ensure services provided across, Leicester Leicestershire and Rutland (LLR) are serving Rutland adequately.
- Identify gaps in services and support.

Links to the full research findings and recommendations are at the end of this document.

Key recommendations and actions

1. SUPPORT

- The VCS should work collectively and in partnership with various funding bodies to secure long-term investment.
- The VCS sector should, jointly with partners, support the sector to find volunteers and trustees.
- Celebrate the sector.

2. RESOURCE

- Support organisations to find funding.
- Set up an easy-to-access 'Small Grants' fund.
- Facilitate and encourage accommodation sharing.

5. REPRESENT

Create an elected representative VCS body that champions the implementation of the strategy.

3. COMMUNICATE

- The VCS, local authorities and funding bodies to build stronger relationships.
- Develop communication channels between VCS organisations.
- Create and maintain a directory of VCS organisations.

4. CONNECT

- The VCS should work with transport providers to improve local transport.
- Develop services in underserved communities.
- Encourage existing 'Social Groups' to extend what they do.
- Organisations covering 'LLR' should ensure Rutland is resourced fairly.

Next steps

Create
Form an elected body with the legitimacy to represent Rutland's VCS to implement the recommendations of the strategy.

Build partnerships
Encourage funders that support Rutland to work in partnership with the VCS to deliver this strategy.

Recognise
Set expectations with statutory bodies that if the VCS in Rutland is to deliver more, it must be adequately funded and resourced.

Further reading

Full project research findings

Rutland VCS Research Findings

Rutland Data Insights

Voluntary Sector Survey Report – full

Voluntary Sector Survey Report - summary

RCC Strategies related to the work of the VCS

Future Rutland Vision

Health and Wellbeing Strategy

RCC Corporate Strategy

RCC Economic Growth Strategy

Strategy research and development team