



## Dorset Communities Forum - Vision Statement

Despite the challenges, we believe that Dorset's VCSE sector has an important role to play in redesigning public services, including:

- Providing local reach and enabling communities;
- Supporting prevention at scale;
- Supporting the statutory sector to reduce demand on acute services;
- Deliver better outcomes for people.

In the scheme of things a small amount of statutory sector funding can go a long way in the VCSE, and we believe that with a clearer understanding of our role and relationship, we can achieve this. This vision statement outlines what this could look like.

### Our relationship with statutory sector

We believe that thinking has been uncertain about the role of Dorset's VCSE sector and civil society in the past, and we do not have a collective understanding on how to make best use of the diversity and dynamic capacity of the sector. Our vision is for:

- 1. Putting civil society at the centre of our thinking**, integrated into a narrative of how to achieve positive social and economic change. In order to do so successfully, the challenges facing the sector need to be honestly appraised, understood and then addressed.
- 2. Giving civil society a seat and a voice at the table of governance locally as equal partners**, sharing plans early, with genuine decision making powers, e.g. resource allocation: making it part of every public services transformation conversation.
- 3. Have a clear understanding of why the VCSE is being invited around the table.** We would like our statutory sector partners to ask themselves: Why are we inviting the VCSE sector? What contribution can they make, and what would we like them to do?

### Local Government Review (LGR)

Assuming we receive a post-election government decision to proceed, LGR has potential to be catastrophic for smaller VCSE sector organisations, as a large proportion of funding for smaller organisations currently comes from district councils e.g. for CABs, Community Partnerships etc. With the loss of district councils this funding could be lost, and is irreplaceable.

Similarly DCC's funding for infrastructure, a non statutory function, could be at risk when DCC ceases to exist, and the new unitary council is formed. We believe that that the new unitary councils would be too remote from residents, and for grass roots democracy to be connected into the new unitary structures we

require a system wide design, supported by 21st century councillors better connected with, and accountable to their communities, and a clear role for an adequately resourced civil society at the centre of this resign of local democracy.

### **Living & Learning Centres**

We welcome DCC's Living & Learning Centres offer for communities, that will feature co-location of services and make better use of properties, with themes of prevention, integration, digital, and location to support delivery of services.

We support the Living & Learning concept, with DCC acting as a facilitator to develop the self determination of local communities. We believe that we can support the Living & Learning team in finding solutions to questions on governance, support, and resourcing volunteers to support the six pilot areas now being run.

### **Local Economic Development**

With the ongoing public sector funding cuts that are hitting our communities hard, we view the role of community led partnerships as central to developing local economies. Community Led Economic Development (CED), currently being piloted in Bridport and Portland, estimates the potential value of re-localising the local economy at a town level, e.g. how many new jobs re-localised food, health & social care, and others sectors might produce. As important, is putting in place new ways of funding local people to take advantage of new opportunities and to start community enterprises CED work creates. Our vision is of healthy local economies that:

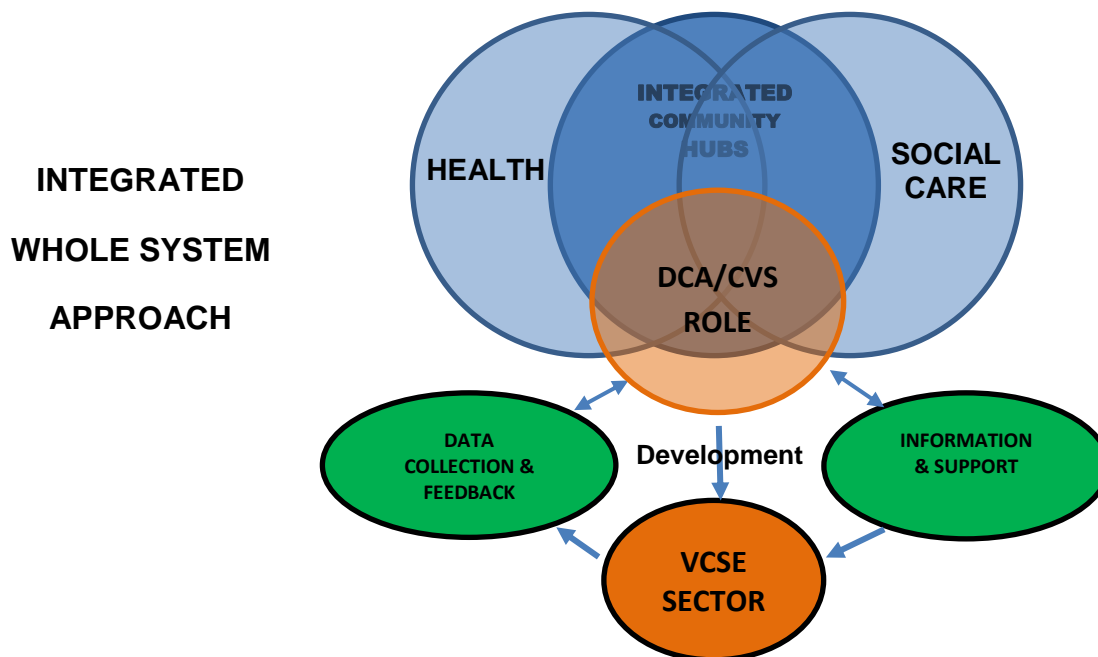
- Enable VCSE sector organisations to control, use or run assets not wanted or under-used by the state or private sector;
- Focus on local commissioning and accountability through town councils, and other new local post LGR structures;
- Embrace the Social Value Act to encourage sustainable development.

CED work brings together local stakeholder organisations, to develop an economic approach that can support more communities in rural Dorset to take control of their economic futures, and to create a bridge with the wider business sector.

### **Health & Social Care**

Prevention is at the core of the health and social care work many VCSE groups deliver, e.g. delivering community fitness activities, social prescription, and mental wellbeing activities, and our vision is of a suitably resourced VCSE sector with an expanded role in delivering interventions that supports statutory sector partners to deliver prevention 'at scale'

**Whole System Approach:** we view integration of the VCSE sector into redesign of Dorset's health & social care system as vital to supporting prevention at scale. We believe this can only be achieved by adopting a whole system approach to the way health, social care and VCSE sectors work together in the future, necessitating that all participants in a system are interconnected, communicating effectively, sharing both information and resources for the benefit of the whole community.



We view taking a whole system approach to further development of health & social care as vital to making best use of the VCSE sector, if we are going to:

- meet the targets of reducing unplanned hospital admissions, and delaying patients going into intensive social care.
- Reducing the demand for high cost care (acute hospital interventions, and long term residential and nursing care);
- Enabling more care to be delivered locally and enabling people to live independently for as long as possible.
- Find VCSE solutions to patient social care issues connecting to a range of trusted VCSE services.

### A longer term investment model

**Boosting social capital and social infrastructure:** we appreciate those public bodies providing ongoing support for VCSE infrastructure organisations. Civil society requires solid foundations to support public service delivery, and having suitable funding to help mobilise the sector is critical to this, though we recognise current tight spending constraints for local government.

For the VCSE sector to 'scale up', there are costs, we can't do everything for free, and investment in the sector is required to support new activity. We do not view this as solely a statutory sector responsibility and envisage the creation of longer term mixed funding models, leveraging statutory sector funding, to access outside investment, with the support of external cross sector funding partnerships, such as that currently being led by the Big Lottery.