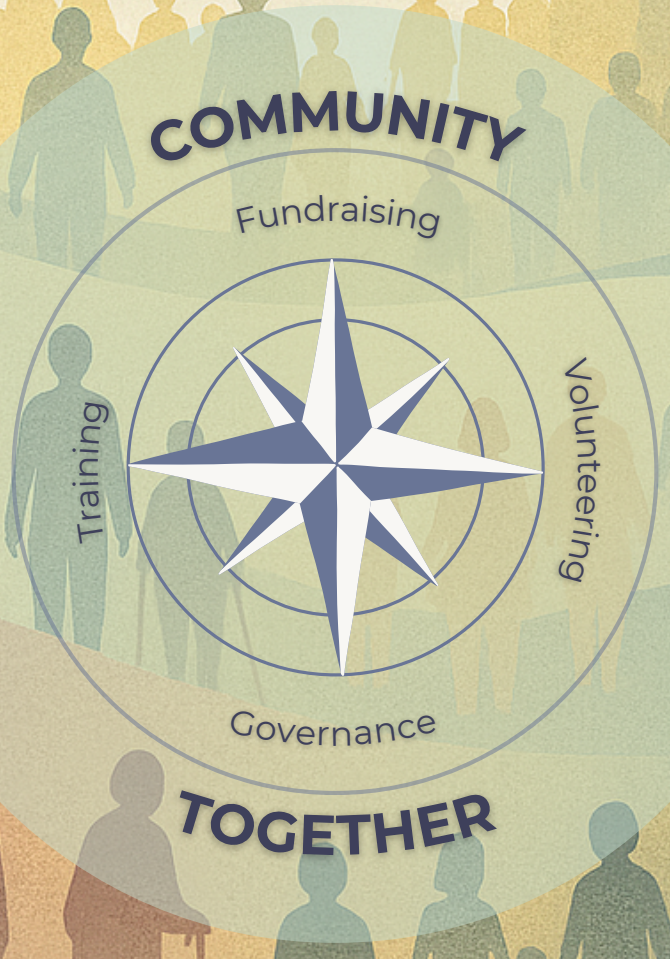
VOLUNTARY ACTION ARUN AND CHICHESTER

2025-2030 STRATEGY



Driving Voluntary Action and Active Communities





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Introduction

Voluntary Action Arun & Chichester (VAAC) is an umbrella organisation that supports the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector (VCSE). We support, nurture and advocate for local communities, whilst working alongside public and corporate partners as key change agents. We amplify the power of the VCSE sector and instigate positive transformations in everyday lives and address long-term societal challenges.

We have a focus on:

1. **Enriching communities**
2. **Inspiring volunteers**
3. **Strengthening the sectors voice and recognition**

Our members help shape everything we do. We are deeply committed to research, co-design, and inclusive collaboration in all aspects of our work. We are not for one single cause, but a range of charity and community causes, and our members vary from small grass roots community organisations to large national charities. What they share in common is a commitment to seeking and delivering positive changes in society. We strive to represent our members in strategic forums and ensure that the needs, impact and issues of the sector are not just acknowledged but are positively supported.

As a charity ourselves we face the same challenges as our members, and our new strategic priorities are a reflection of both the issues and opportunities facing the local VCSE sector over the next five years.

Our new strategy builds on the foundations laid by the 2022-2025 plan, further shaping VAAC's role as a key organisation supporting and sustaining the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector across Arun and Chichester. We are recognised by our partners and funders for our effective delivery, and this strong track record will be the cornerstone of our continued development throughout the lifetime of this strategy.

This strategy will be delivered in a period of significant change for local government and as such VAAC's service offer needs to reflect this, and be relevant to the provision across West Sussex, and to some degree all of Sussex. The VCSE will continue to be challenged and the need for sustainable funding streams will remain a constant for VAAC members, and VAAC itself.

Our key achievements and milestones over the last three years include:

38%

Increased VAAC membership by 38% from 449 to 618.

Investment in our cloud-based ICT systems.

Over 300 members supported by direct referrals.

Over £1.9 million secured for VAAC members.

New consultation service introduced.

Freelance opportunities introduced to extend our work and reach.

12

Commissioned opportunities via Sussex NHS and NHS England.

Partnerships with both University of Sussex and University of Chichester.

Restructured and reshaped our services to ensure our future.

Invested in financial management thereby increasing VAAC's financial resilience.

Joint work with West Sussex Links, with VAAC's focus being VCSE training.

Greater emphasis on marginalised communities and programmes that deliver equity, diversity and inclusion.

150

Placement of an average of 150 volunteers a year with highest number 173 achieved in 2023-2024.

Updated our Memorandum of Association and Articles to reflect changes in the way we are governed /work.

Our ambitions for the next three years will focus on building on these solid foundations.

To do so we will need to:

Sector

- Enhance and develop our service offer, articulating effectively, our approach and impact.
- Strengthen and develop more partnerships and joint initiatives across the VCSE sector in West Sussex.
- Maintain our reputation for innovation and delivery with funders and partners.
- Continue to advocate for the VCSE sector at all strategic levels, challenging and changing systems.
- Become a community investment funder for the VCSE sector and a conduit for grant funding.
- Have a vibrant and active VAAC membership that collaborates and supports one another.
- Articulate our USP to a range of audiences.
- Build on our CPD offer for the VCSE sector across West Sussex.
- Continue to campaign for equity, inclusion and diversity in all sectors.
- Embrace AI and the positive difference it will make, but provide the 'human' empathy and explanation.
- Act as a conduit for grass roots funding increasing the reach and opportunities.

Operationally

- Upgrade our website and systems.
- Ensure long-term financial resilience through strategic planning, exploring new delivery models and collaborative opportunities.
- Strengthen and further diversify the Board of Trustees ensuring broad representation and expertise.
- Increase our membership base by a 1/3 whilst ensuring we know our members' profile and activities.
- Diversify our membership with a focus on sports, environmental and arts organisations.
- Evidence the social value of the VCSE sector and maximise Corporate Social Responsibility opportunities.



Context

Facts and figures about our sector:

Grassroots charities make up **96%** of the UK's voluntary sector

Small charities have seen a **£4.6 billion decline** in funding

Larger charities have seen a **£4.5 billion increase** in funding

75% of all sector income is concentrated in just **1%** of organisations

10 biggest charities spend more on fundraising alone than the total income of over **75,000** smaller charities

In England just **7,000** of the **170,000** registered charities earn over **£1** million annually

Source: 1 Civil Society, Charity sector income shrinks, 2024. / 2 The Charity Commission, Registered charities in England and Wales, 2024.



The governments recently published Civil Society Covenant and funding opportunities within it. This Covenant represents a significant step forward – a principles-based agreement designed to reset and enhance collaboration at all levels.

It includes:

- A principles-based agreement, including respect for our value and independence.
- Case studies and an illustrative document to indicate what good looks like.
- A new Joint Civil Society Covenant Council, bringing together civil society and senior officials to direct and review implementation, as well as oversee task and finish groups.
- A Local Partnerships Programme, designed to support better working relationships between local authorities, public bodies and civil society.
- A developing VCSE-HM Treasury forum, providing a regular space for engagement on economic and financial issues affecting the sector.
- Commitment to update guidance to ensure model grant and service contract templates are clear, and consistent with the principles of the Covenant.

The next three years will see a significant amount of political change at a national and regional level. Key developments include:

- Reform of Local Government Reform with Sussex wide Devolution.
- The implementation of the Ten-Year Health Plan, including the roll out of social care and health integration.
- The governments increased focus on children and young people.
- Changes to welfare system with focus on incapacity benefit.
- Continuing financial pressures in the system (NHS/WSCC/Districts).

This is set against a background of the impacts of climate change, economic pressures and worldwide uncertainty.

It is also a time of rapid ICT advancement, and AI will transform every sector including the VCSE. Within such a state of flux, it's crucial that VAAC applies its clear strategic vision and continues to be creative and flexible in its delivery over the lifetime of this strategy.

The tough economic times are set to continue at the same time as political, economic, and technological change. VAAC needs to navigate change to the support and guidance we offer to our members, raising our collective voice about the issues that matter and the realities facing our communities. VCSE organisations remain at the forefront of tackling some of the most pressing social issues, from poverty and inequality to climate change and community cohesion.

It is highly likely that Devolution and Local Government reorganisation will cause delays in decision-making for contract tendering processes and organisational finances. Funding across the sector will remain challenging.

VCSE organisations will also need to adapt to the technological shifts being created by AI and the adaptations to the realities of the climate crisis. AI will continue to reshape how we live and work. The development of our plans and strategies to make sure VAAC get the maximum positive potential from these and other technologies is crucial. Similarly, the continuing climate crisis is already having a direct impact on the work of voluntary organisations – both in terms of the impact on the communities they support and the design of services. VCSE will have a vital role in advocating for a greener and equitable future for everyone and must continue to adapt their operations and consider how they are contributing to the achievement of climate targets.

As they face unprecedented challenges, we expect the resilience and innovation of the VCSE will come to the fore over the next three years.

We are aligning VAAC's delivery model to ensure we meet the challenges, exploit the opportunities, build on our strengths and mitigate the threats that we will face in the next three years.



"Economic uncertainty, difficult funding landscapes, and evolving political priorities require us to rethink how we operate, collaborate, and advocate for change. Now more than ever, we must harness the power of innovation, collaborative partnership, and digital transformation to sustain and grow our impact"

NCVO: THE ROAD AHEAD 2025



Strategic consultation

VAAC's strategic direction has been shaped through a consultation process, grounded in both internal reflection and external engagement. We launched the strategic consultation with our members at our AGM on 8th October 2024, this was followed by an online consultation on the VAAC web site/e-bulletin. Members were asked to prioritise our strategic priorities. There was also a face-to-face consultation meeting in Bognor Regis in February, and Chichester in March 2025.

The members feedback indicated that their top three priorities are:

1. **Focus on the sustainability of VAAC and our members - funding/financial management, governance and partnerships.**
2. **Increase participation in volunteering and achieve greater recognition of the value of volunteering.**
3. **Unite the VCSE sector, public bodies, and corporate partners through powerful collaborations to amplify community power.**

The VAAC Trustees considered this strategy at a Design Thinking workshop on 14th April 2025. The action plan from that workshop allowed us to develop a value matrix of actions that will be delivered over 2025-2030. VAAC's Risk Register runs parallel to this document and further session on reviewing strategic risks are planned.

VAAC operates in a highly complex environment, balancing multiple expectations, relationships, and pressures. New research commissioned by NAVCA (National Association for Voluntary and Community Action) highlights this situation and how demanding it is:

- **As organisations in their own right – managing multiple stakeholders and expectations.**
- **In the challenges they encounter – working at different levels within a diverse VCSE sector and with statutory partners.**
- **Within a shifting landscape – adapting to changes in policy, funding, and service delivery locally and nationally.**

Each of these factors influences the others, meaning small changes, positive or negative, can have ripple effects across the entire system.

NAVCA evidence indicates high expectations, limited capacity with small teams stretched beyond capacity, sometimes taking on more than they are funded for. At the same time, local authorities and health systems are facing their own financial and staffing pressures and therefore often place high expectations on organisations to step in and fill gaps.



"Given these challenges, organisations need strong leadership, strategic decision-making, and the ability to set boundaries while maintaining key relationships. There's no one-size-fits-all solution, but research suggests that organisations with a clear vision, sustainable funding models, and strong governance are better able to manage complexity and remain effective"

NAVCA: WALKING A TIGHTROPE 2025

Our Team

We deliver our work through a skilled and committed group of Trustees, supported by a dedicated team comprising of volunteers, a small core of knowledgeable and experienced staff and specialist freelancers. This ensures that we have talent and expertise to deliver our work as change agents. and ensure our members are successful and sustainable. This also ensures we are flexible, agile and creative and good value for money.

We create trusted relationships with the VCSE community and this is based on the pillars of:

- Community leadership
- Accessible approaches
- Mutual respect
- Positive outcomes
- Embedding co-design princples



Collaborations

We are a key partner of West Sussex Links whose membership is drawn from VCSE support organisations and we also link to other comparable organisations across Sussex. We anticipate increased West Sussex and pan-Sussex collaborative working on key areas such as volunteering, communications, and funding.

With up-and-coming Mayoral Elections and likely LGR we recognise that significant changes will emerge. VAAC will adapt to these developments, acknowledging the potential impacts on our organisation and the wider sector.

The NHS has also transitioned to a NHS Surrey and Sussex footprint, and this will impact on the VCSE sector and related commissioning. We are actively engaged in the Integrated Neighbourhood development programme with the NHS and other public bodies. The delivery of our work with the NHS has been ground-breaking over the last 3 years, therefore we need to build on this evidence of impact across the new structures in Arun and Chichester.

We will seek to preserve and amplify local expertise and delivery models from smaller/medium organisations to ensure our rich grassroots organisations are not lost in the move to larger statutory footprints.

VAAC works closely with our key funders, including Arun District Council (ADC), Chichester District Council (CDC) and West Sussex County Council (WSCC).

Our collaborative efforts focus on priority areas such as:

- **Health inequalities**
- **Community cohesion and safety**
- **Mental Health with a strong emphasis on early intervention**

Our projects over the last three years have brought us close to academia and in particular Sussex and Chichester Universities and we envisage building on this initial work over the next three years, with a focus on:

- **Expanding student and PHD placement opportunities across our membership.**
- **Developing a Trusteeships programme for students.**
- **Launching student challenge projects for the VCSE sector.**
- **Strengthening links with the University of Chichester's "From Adversity to University" programme.**
- **Engaging with the University of Sussex's Research Engagement Network REN.**

Within the VCSE sector we anticipate an increase in restructures/mergers/organisational changes and closures and as a support organisation we need to gear up our services to support these transitions.



VAAC's Vision

To see a thriving, inclusive and strong VCSE sector that unites, supports, inspires, and empowers individuals and communities driving transformative change towards an equitable society.

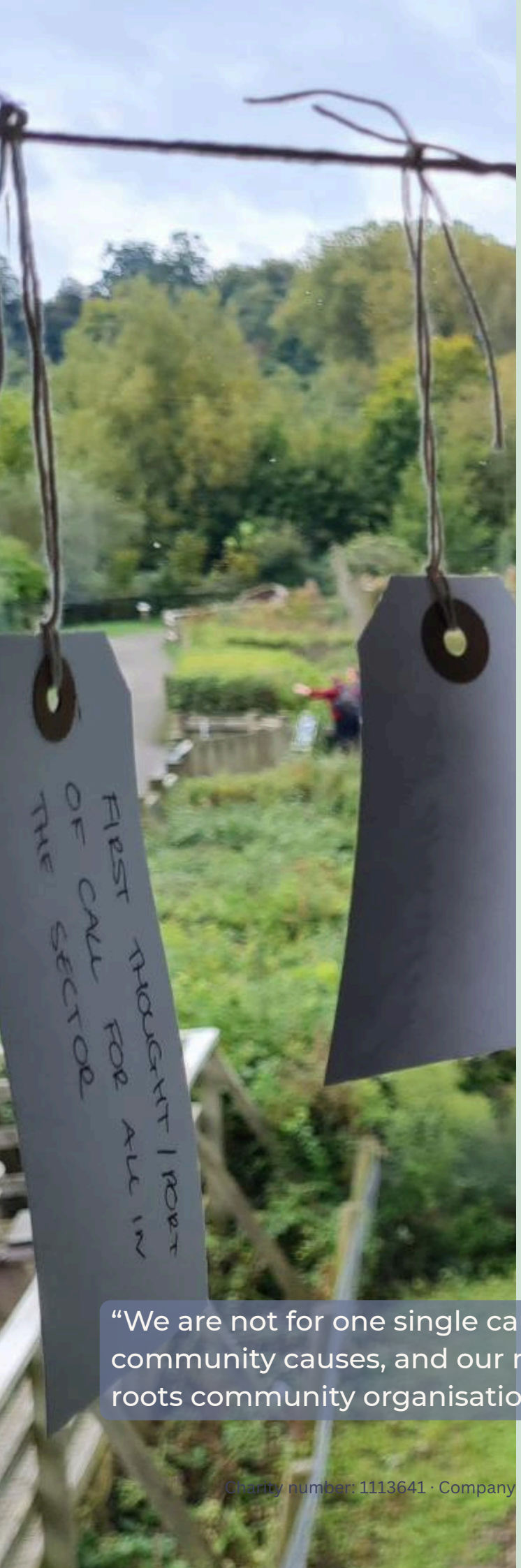
The Mission /Our Purpose

Our purpose is to ensure the VCSE sector thrives and delivers in response to local needs. We facilitate solutions to community issues, overcoming challenges and advocating for impactful, sustainable change – benefiting each person, each organisation and every community we serve.

We deliver this via:

- Supporting and developing leaders and advocates across diverse communities.
- Volunteering - encouraging and developing opportunities.
- Providing developmental support, advice and community development and investment.
- Partnership work- bringing together networks/working across sectors.
- Advocating for the VCSE with public and corporate sectors.
- Understanding our membership base.
- Measurement and evaluation of the impact of the VCSE and volunteers ensuring this is recognised and resourced.





Our Organisational Values:

- Equity, inclusion and diversity
- Facilitation
- Collaboration
- Innovation
- Amplify/ Impact
- Setting the ‘bar’/expertise
- Catalyst
- Curiosity and creativity

Our Team Values:

- Honest communication
- Building Trust
- Support one another
- Commitment and enthusiasm
- Understanding each other
- Celebrating success
- Delivering the good
- Fun and excitement in our working relationships
- Shared responsibility

“We are not for one single cause, but a range of charity and community causes, and our members vary from small grass roots community organisations to large national charities.”

VAAC's Strategic Priorities



Raise the profile of the sector and the support we offer, and be the '*first port of call*' for VCSE organisations.



Embed research, monitoring evaluation in everything we deliver.



Focus on the sustainability of VAAC and our members- funding/financial management, governance and partnerships.



Increase participation in volunteering and achieve greater recognition of the value of volunteering.



Champion equity, inclusion and diversity in everything we deliver.



Drive forward the sector's adaptation to climate change and net zero, and enhance community resilience.



Unite the VCSE sector, public bodies, and corporate partners through powerful collaborations to amplify community power.

Strategic Priority 1

Raise the profile of the sector and the support we offer, and be the '*first port of call*' for VCSE organisations.

OBJECTIVES
1.1 Implement a cycle of continuous improvement and be open to new ideas and new ways of working.
1.2 Increase our membership/network in arts, sport and health sectors.
1.3 Publish the positive contribution of the VCSE in an impactful and meaningful format including the use of effective social media.
1.4 Invest and develop a website that provides guidance/support and allows for self-service by members, and be aware of opportunities provided by technological advancement.
1.5 Adoption by VAAC members social return on investment measurement.



Strategic Priority 2



Embed research, monitoring evaluation in everything we deliver.

OBJECTIVES
2.1 Ensure our work reflects research findings and consultation results.
2.2 Conduct research into societal issues with a focus on inequity.
2.3 Partner with academic institutions to improve our community research and our measures of effectiveness.
2.4 Set the standard for VCSE support and reflect best practice.
2.5 Be aware of emerging local, regional and national approaches and policies that impact on the VCSE sector.



Strategic Priority 3



Focus on the sustainability of VAAC and our members- funding/financial management, governance and partnerships.

OBJECTIVES
3.1 Proactively identify VAAC members who need input/support to strengthen their financial sustainability.
3.2 Provide a range of consultative services that respond to the identified needs of VAAC members.
3.3 Ensure the roll out and adoption on AI in fundraising bids.
3.4 Embed video/story telling with a range of VAAC members.
3.5 Increase the resources invested in the VCSE via fundraising guidance, sponsorship, in kind support, and CSR programmes.
3.6 Work with funders towards long-term funding, core funding and flexible programmes of support.
3.7 Training CPD coordinated, delivered, and evaluated across the VCSE in West Sussex.
3.8 Develop community investment programmes including commissions and grant aid to funders.



Strategic Priority 4

Increase participation in volunteering and achieve greater recognition of the value of volunteering.

OBJECTIVES
4.1 Increase numbers of volunteers and associated volunteer opportunities.
4.2 Develop a volunteer kite mark for members and achieve the NCVO national accreditation.
4.3 Promote the benefits of volunteering regarding health, employment and skills.
4.4 Grow volunteering in under-represented groups by working with VAAC members.
4.5 Advise and develop schemes that promote corporate volunteers.
4.6 Develop initiatives that develop, recognise and celebrate volunteers and volunteering.
4.7 Work directly with diversity on development of a pathway to Trusteeships with VAAC.



Strategic Priority 5



Champion equity, inclusion and diversity in everything we deliver.

OBJECTIVES
5.1 Ensure that marginalised groups, including disabled people, ethnically diverse and minority communities are integral to the work of VAAC.
5.2 Deliver joint projects with academic institutions: ‘Adversity to University’ etc.
5.3 Implement training and awareness programmes focused on Equity, Inclusion and Diversity.
5.4 Build on our relationship with NHS/PCT’s to ensure an effective and measurable response to health inequity.
5.5 Act as VCSE lead for ICB and ICT in relevant localities and including representation at the Health and Wellbeing Board.



Strategic Priority 6

Drive forward the sector's adaptation to climate change and net zero, and enhance community resilience.

OBJECTIVES
6.1 Lead the sectors response to climate change and net zero targets.
6.2 Link to national, regional and local work on community resilience.
6.3 Work with key VCSE organisations to raise the profile of the sector's work with regards adapting to climate change.
6.4 Work with young people on climate initiatives.
6.5 Increase volunteering with respect to climate emergencies and community resilience.



Strategic Priority 7

Unite the VCSE sector, public bodies, and corporate partners through powerful collaborations to amplify community power.

OBJECTIVES
7.1 Contribute to a range of strategic partnerships to include: economic, health, culture, care, community safety, community resilience, environment.
7.2 Ensure the diversity of the VCSE is represented: scale, issues, geography.
7.3 Report on the impact of collaboration and ensure that the contribution of VAAC members is recognized, acknowledged and rewarded.
7.4 Demonstrate the impact of preventative work of VAAC members and secure investment in the VCSE sector for this work.
7.5 Invest time in building corporate partnerships.



Thank you

We would like to thank our donors and our funders, Arun District Council, University of Sussex, (Brighton & Sussex Medical School), Chichester City Council, Chichester District Council, Diversity Resource International, Hyde Charitable Trust, NHS Sussex, Meadow Blue Community Energy and West Sussex County Council for their support.

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