



Voluntary Action
Swindon



Annual Review
2015 - 2016

Foreword by Lord Joel Joffe

Swindon has a vibrant voluntary and community sector which makes a great difference to the lives of all its citizens, including the deprived and those suffering from disabilities.

It also has a Borough Council which, over the years, has led the town's development, and which has an exciting vision for Swindon's future. However with the cutback in Government funding and the increasing demands of the elderly and the vulnerable, the Council has no alternative other than to cut back on social funding.

The only way of filling the gap is for the Voluntary Sector / Community and the Council to work together, in partnership, to ensure that Swindon becomes an even better town in which to live and work. An exciting community engagement process has already started which will see the Council, Voluntary Action Swindon (VAS) and active citizens working in partnership for the benefit of Swindon.

VAS has a pivotal role to play, as an infrastructure organization, in aligning and supporting the voluntary and community sector by helping to support voluntary groups, individuals and networks to grow in capacity and capability. VAS can also help by representing the views of the sector and community to its policy makers.

Lord Joel Joffe



Trustees, Staff and Volunteers April 2015 - March 2016

Current Trustees (as of November 2016):

Tim Ward (Chair) – Appointed Sept 2015
Arthur Amos (Vice Chair) – Appointed Sept 2015
John Markey (Treasurer) – Appointed Sept 2015
Bob Barrett – Appointed Sept 2015
David Bell – Appointed Sept 2015
Steve Henderson – Appointed Sept 2015
Ram Thiagarajah – Appointed Sept 2015

Other Trustees who served during the year:

Dorothy Brown – Resigned April 2015
Heather Hunter – Resigned April 2015
Jaginder Singh – Appointed Sept 2015, Resigned Feb 2016
Mike Khan – Resigned March 2016
Nazma Ramruttun – Resigned Sept 2015
Daniel Rose – Resigned April 2015

Staff and Volunteers (as of November 2016):

Richard Hill – Chief Executive Officer
Seniz Mutlu – Development Manager (Maternity Leave)
Russell Francis – Development Manager
Hannah Parry – Development Officer
Shaz Qaddus – Finance Officer
James Moss – Administration Officer
Jonathan Harris – Facilities and Maintenance Officer
Linda West – Volunteer
Charmaine Fisher – Volunteer
Kevin Cordell – Volunteer
JB Gurung – Volunteer

Other Staff and Volunteers who served during the year:

David Wray – CEO
Heather Hunter – Interim CEO
Jane Butler – Development Manager
Hayley Ferris – Receptionist & Facilities Administrator
Sarah Howell – Receptionist & Administrator
Chrissy Seymour – Receptionist
Gill Broome – Volunteer
Matthew Oland – Volunteer
Bernard Wick – Volunteer

Chair's Report

I have had a long association with Voluntary Action Swindon and I consider it a privilege to be the current Chair of Trustees.

Most of the Trustees, including myself, were appointed at the September 2015 AGM. We joined the Board after an unsettled period which saw the resignation of Trustees and the departure of the then Chief Executive, David Wray. A new Chief Executive, Heather Hunter, had already been appointed on an interim basis.

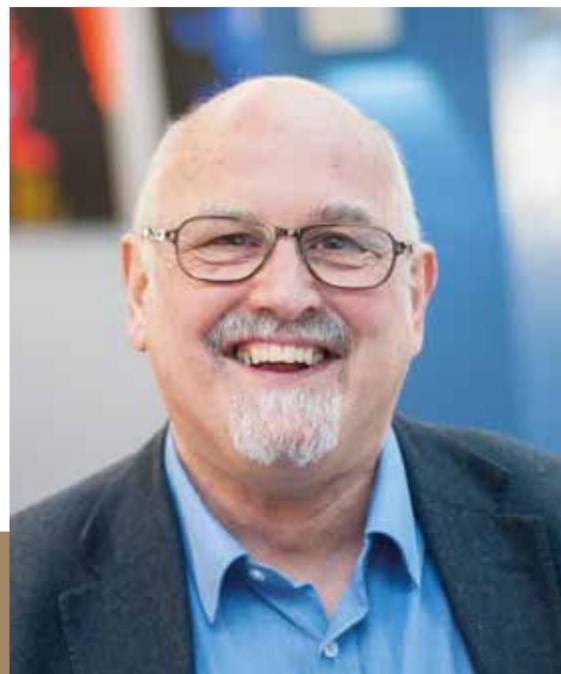
From the beginning, we have aimed to set high standards of governance, ensuring that meetings are properly recorded, including decisions made by Trustees. The atmosphere on the Board has been positive and collegiate. Trustees have a shared commitment to do our best to ensure that Voluntary Action Swindon is doing things right and doing the right things. Raising standards in governance of VAS has given a firm foundation to allow us to address other priorities.

The financial position of VAS was our next priority. Although we have reasonable reserves, the Board took the view that we could not sustain year-on-year losses at the level expected for 15/16. The Board prioritised reducing costs – a task which became more important when we were faced with a significant

reduction in our income from the local authority from April 2016. As part of our cost reductions, we terminated the interim CEO role in December 2015 and asked the Operations Manager, Richard Hill, to take on an interim role as Chief Operating Officer (he has since been appointed as Chief Executive Officer).

The Board is pleased with the progress that has been made in putting the organisation once again on a sound footing. Much of our work in the last 12 months has been internally focused and building the foundation for a more settled and sustainable future. However, our priority going forward is to engage with members and wider stakeholders to set the future direction for Voluntary Action Swindon to ensure we play our part in promoting a healthy and vibrant voluntary and community sector in Swindon.

Tim Ward



Chief Operating Officer's Report

Welcome to our annual review of 2015/16.

As many of you know, the year brought numerous challenges and in many ways it has been an unsettling period for VAS. I am pleased to say, however, that we have made a great deal of progress across a wide range of areas over the past 12 months. A few examples are:

- Restoring robust governance to the organisation – as Tim Ward explains in his separate update
- Rebuilding confidence in VAS with Swindon Borough Council and with other key stakeholders. For example, we have ensured we have the right focus on delivering the requirements of our Voluntary Sector Support Contract with the Borough, which helped us secure a 12 month extension to the arrangement in April 2016
- Ensuring full control over our finances and a clear line of sight to balancing our budget
- Reviewing and updating all our operational policies and procedures for both VAS and Sanford House (Swindon Advice And Support Centre). This includes, among many other things, the appointment of an external provider of HR services,

who have reviewed and updated all our employment policies and documentation and who provide us with ongoing advice and support.

Elsewhere in this review you will see many other examples of our achievements during the past year. Despite the challenges we have faced, these demonstrate the value of what we continue to deliver to help sustain and grow a thriving local voluntary and community sector – and therefore in turn help many of the most vulnerable people in Swindon. But I also wanted to take this opportunity to focus on our work at Sanford House.

As you may be aware, we have a 10 year agreement to manage Sanford. This covers a range of responsibilities including:

- Looking after the physical aspects of the building
- Attracting tenants and managing the sub-letting of office space
- Supporting collaboration and the sharing of best practice among tenant organisations
- Being the first port of call for tenant queries and issues

None of these are easy tasks and being a landlord does bring with it a number of issues. For example, the enforced decommissioning of the heating system, and resulting

absence of any central heating in the building for the first half of the winter, was an 'interesting' challenge!

Nevertheless, VAS is playing a lead role in making a success of this innovative support hub. We have now successfully let out all of the office space and this means that a total of 13 different organisations currently provide information, advice, advocacy and other forms of support to Swindon residents out of a single, conveniently located building – either as tenants or as users of the hot desk facilities. We have also started renovation of the adjacent caretaker's cottage, which when complete will allow us to provide valuable 'move on' accommodation for those in need.

My thanks go to the VAS staff, our volunteers and our Trustee Board who have achieved much in what have been, at times, very testing circumstances.

Looking forward

Given the need to stabilise various operational and other issues, our focus during 2015/16 has needed to be rather more internal than we would have ideally liked. However, it's now time for us to look forward and outward, and I am starting to develop our medium / longer term plans in conjunction with the trustees.



We have begun a joint consultation exercise, with Swindon Borough Council, to assess current issues and needs in the sector, get input into what people think VAS should focus on in the future, and feed into the Council's commissioning plans. You as members will, of course, be invited to play an important role in this consultation.

Whilst we are therefore still finalising our plans, I expect more frequent communication and engagement with our members to feature prominently. We will also develop an approach to ensure VAS reaffirms its status as the leading voice for the voluntary and community sector with policy makers.

Also, and as Lord Joffe mentions in his foreword, we are partnering with the Council on an ambitious and exciting piece of community engagement work, involving a wide

range of people in developing action plans to support, sustain and grow active citizenship for the benefit of Swindon. We are coordinating work in five key areas:

- Improving consultation and communication, within and across sectors and communities
- Celebrating Swindon – building 'Brand Swindon' and encouraging civic pride
- Developing a cross sector approach to innovation and skills funding
- Supporting employment for people with physical and mental difficulties
- Sharing knowledge and taking action to stimulate volunteering

We will, of course, keep you informed as this work progresses.

Thank you all for your continued support for VAS, and may I take this opportunity to wish you all the very best for the rest of 2016 and beyond.

Richard Hill

215,799

people living in the Borough of Swindon (2014 estimate)

444

registered charities

15

square miles in size



Photo ©Justin Smythe

Sector Support & Development

Funding & Governance Advice

Through the 2015-16 year, we provided advice on organisational, governance, and funding issues to local charities and community groups. Support was delivered via one-to-one advice sessions and through training courses.

Typical activities included:

- Reviewing funding applications to charitable trusts
- Providing information on how to run community events
- Creating and reviewing a fundraising strategy
- Helping to set up new charities, including assistance with writing a governing document
- Assisting with drafting policies and making sure charities follow best practice

Training courses and workshops included:

- Understanding Pension Auto-Enrolment
- “What’s my Story” – Working With the Local Media
- Trustee Roles & Responsibilities
- Understanding Risk Management
- European Social Investment Funding
- Writing Better Funding Applications
- Understanding Community Foundation Grants
- Social Investment & BIG Potential funding
- Heritage Lottery Fund for Equality Groups

55

organisations given one-to-one advice on governance or organisational issues

74

organisations given one-to-one funding advice

1,000

contacts supplied with funding information and articles on good governance via the weekly VASid news bulletin

£445,747

in grants raised by organisations supported by Voluntary Action Swindon

Testimonials

“Thanks for all your great support in this funding application! It wasn’t a straightforward or easy process, so your advice was greatly appreciated.”

“I just wanted to pass on my thanks to everyone for the wonderful training session I attended yesterday – I am inspired!”

“I found the course very helpful and learned that applying for grants is quite complex! I know we now need to spend time detailing exactly who we are and what we plan to do.”

“We have just been awarded £5k for core costs from the Wiltshire Community Foundation! Attending your workshop proved its worth.”

“VAS are prompt with replies, approachable and dependable. Overall VAS is a reliable service that is very much needed by the voluntary sector in Swindon. Through their work they have created many opportunities for organisations like ours and as a result our services have benefitted immensely.”

“We always find the training sessions to be well run and useful. VAS’s help with funding applications showed me how I had completely misunderstood what I was being asked for.”

Case Studies

Pinehust Initiative Forum

VAS provided information on funding sources, gave advice on publicising an event, and helped them to recruit volunteers. As a result, the Forum secured £1,000 from Sovereign Housing towards a well attended fun day which brought together the community in a disadvantaged neighbourhood.

Swindon Women's Aid

VAS gave advice and a detailed review of an application to the Big Lottery Fund. As a result, Swindon Women's Aid secured £80,500 from the Big Lottery Fund to provide play workers for children affected by domestic abuse.

Swindon Equality Coalition

VAS supported the recruitment and induction of Equality Coalition Working Group members and representatives to the Council's Equality Advisory Forum, working towards representation of all nine protected characteristics.

Sports Forum

VAS supports the administration of Swindon Sports Forum. The result of an initiative from Swindon Borough Council, the Sports Forum is run by a committee of dedicated volunteers from a variety of local sports clubs, from football to water polo. The mission of Swindon Sports Forum is for sport to succeed and flourish in Swindon. In the 2015-16 year, VAS administered the Sports Forum's bi-monthly steering group meetings, acted as a focal point for contact, communications and diary management, and facilitated 3 public Sports Forum events. These included the Sports Forum's AGM and the Sports Awards, in which a total of £14,000 was awarded to 14 clubs.



Let's Loop Swindon

Swindon Equality Coalition and Voluntary Action Swindon supported the Let's Loop Swindon initiative by providing communications support, venues for meetings/events and by contributing to the quarterly Let's Loop meetings which is a steering group that oversees this work. The Brunel Shopping Centre in Swindon is to be a champion centre for Hearing Loops and awareness about Hearing Loss. In a phased introduction they will develop the centre as well, including mechanisms to provide fire alerts for people with Hearing Loss.

Sector Survey

In partnership with Swindon Borough Council, Voluntary Action Swindon delivered a survey of the Voluntary & Community Sector in late 2015.

This wide-ranging survey included questions on funding, sustainability, governance issues, volunteering, and beneficiary groups. The survey was completed by more than 120 local charities and community groups, providing VAS and Swindon Borough Council with a snapshot of the needs and challenges of the local sector.

Some interesting findings were:

- Four out of five respondents rely on regular, committed volunteers to deliver their services, showing that regular, committed volunteers are the backbone of the sector

- More than half of respondents receive funding in the form of grants and public donations. Grants are by some distance the most important source of financial resources for the voluntary sector

- Over a quarter of groups reported an increase in funding, while one in five said their income had declined

- VAS was well known by respondents, with over half saying they were very familiar with our work. VAS was seen as a highly effective partner, achieving the highest proportion of 'very effective' ratings compared to other local organisations including Wiltshire Police, the Clinical Commissioning Group, local schools and colleges, and Swindon Borough Council

- The biggest challenges for respondents were financial, including needing help with external funding, and struggling to afford to continue providing services; and recruiting and retaining volunteers. Many organisations found themselves under pressure to fill the gaps left by cuts in statutory services.

Community Fair

In March 2016 VAS organised a Community Fair, held at TWIGS Community Gardens. The fair was themed around Combatting Loneliness and Isolation to Improve Health and Wellbeing. Fifteen charities and community organisations were present on the day to publicise their important work in the town.

230+

Swindon residents visited the Community Fair

145

of those attending learned about new organisations, services and activities



VAS Services

Printing

VAS provides high quality, cost-effective printing for the voluntary and community sector in Swindon. We can print your charity leaflets, posters, flyers, newsletters and business cards. Just email your printing through to us at info@vas-swinton.org and we'll let you know when you can come and pick it up from our offices on John Street, in the town centre. We can also do your folding and booklet making. Prices start from 5p per side of A4.

DBS Checks

If your organisation works with children or vulnerable adults, you may need to get DBS checks on your staff and volunteers. VAS offers a discounted rate to charities and voluntary organisations, from £12 per volunteer and £56 per employee.

Room Hire

If you are looking for space to hire in the town centre, get in touch with VAS! We can offer a range of meeting spaces, from large conference rooms to one-to-one meeting rooms and hot desk facilities. You can also order refreshments and hire equipment for use in our rooms. Room hire begins from £8 per hour for small meeting rooms, and £65 per day for large conference rooms.

PAT Testing

VAS now offers a PAT testing service for the voluntary and community sector in Swindon. The call out fee is £20, and each item (up to 100 items) costs £1, and 65p thereafter.

Training

VAS offers a range of training courses for the local voluntary sector, including Emergency First Aid, Fire Safety Training, Manual Handling, Health & Safety, and Food Safety. These courses can be arranged ad hoc, so please contact us if you are interested.

For further information on all our services, please see our website at www.vas-swinton.org or call us on 01793 538398.

VAS id

VAS id (information digest) is our weekly e-bulletin, with all the relevant news and information about the voluntary and community sector in Swindon. VAS id is sent to around 1,000 people in the local area.

Sign up at our website or by emailing us at: vasid@vas-swinton.org

If you have something to share about what your charity or community group is up to – news, upcoming events, training courses, funding opportunities or vacancies – send it to us at vasid@vas-swinton.org and we will feature it in VAS id.



This summary financial information is taken from the trustees' annual report and statutory financial statements, which has been approved by the trustees before the AGM. The statutory financial statements, on which the auditor, Chris Vaughan Reeves & Co has given an unqualified audit report, will be submitted to the Registrar of Companies and the Charity Commission.

This summary information may not contain sufficient information to gain a complete understanding of the financial affairs of the charity. The full Trustees' report, statutory financial statements and auditors' report may be downloaded from the VAS website or the charity commission website - www.charity-commission.gov.uk

Auditor: Chris Vaughan - Reeves & Co,
Argyle Street, Swindon, SN2 8AR

VAS ACCOUNTS SUMMARY: YEAR TO 31 MARCH 2016		
	2015-2016	2014-2015
	£,000	£,000
INCOME		
Rent	81	51
Printing	5	7
Training	2	2
Interest	2	2
Other	7	7
PROJECTS		
SBC – Strategic Development	24	13
SBC – Community Sector Support	125	125
Building Health Partnerships	-	32
SBC/Job Centre (ILM)	-	19
SBC – Time Bank	-	21
SBC – Sanford House	81	76
VCS – Involve	9	8
Other Income	-	-
Total Income	336	363

VAS ACCOUNTS SUMMARY: YEAR TO 31 MARCH 2016		
	2015-2016	2014-2015
	£,000	£,000
EXPENDITURE		
Staff Costs	-185	-257
Other Costs	-163	-117
Depreciation	-0	-6
Audit fees	-2	-2
Total Expenditure	-350	-382
Net Deficit	-14	-19

BALANCE SHEET		
	2015-2016	2014-2015
	£,000	£,000
Fixed Assets	90	90
Bank Accounts	188	240
Other Assets	7	6
TOTAL	285	336
Liabilities	-20	-57
Net Funds	265	279

The trustees have examined the reserves policy in the light of the predominant risks to the charity. The reserves are required to cover late payment, loss of grant aid funding and other shortfalls of income so as to ensure full and timely delivery of, or appropriate exit from, planned programmes and ongoing provision of services.

A policy has been established whereby unrestricted funds, not committed or invested in tangible fixed assets held by the charity, should be four months of running costs. A designated sum of £70,000 has been set aside for the property maintenance fund and a further £55,000 for the operational reserve fund. A designated sum of £10,000 has been set aside for the property fund, which will allow Voluntary Action Swindon to identify new premises and pay for surveyors and architects, when appropriate. Voluntary Action Swindon will continue to build reserves through operating surpluses if available.



How to Find / Contact Us

Address:
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SN1 1RT



Tel: 01793 538398
Email: info@vas-swindon.org
Website: www.vas-swindon.org
You can scan the QR Code with your phone to get to our website.

Opening Hours: 9:30am – 4:30pm, Monday – Friday

We are based in the town centre, only 5 minutes walk from the Fleming Way bus station. You can reach us by turning off Fleming Way onto Fleet Street and following the road around to John Street. Our building is on the left.

The cheapest car parks near to us are the Whalebridge (Islington Street, SN1 1TN) and Spring Gardens (Spring Gardens, SN1 2BF) car parks. The closest car park is at the end of John St on the left.

Find us on Facebook and Twitter:
www.facebook.com/voluntaryactionswindon
www.twitter.com/vaswindon



Designed by:
Hannah Parry

Photo credit, Swindon town centre (page 8 & 9):
Justin Smythe

