

Voluntary Action Swindon

Working for thriving communities and voluntary organisations



Annual Review 2016-17

Foreword

Claire Newport, Chief Executive, Citizens Advice Swindon

The strength of partnership working within Swindon's voluntary and community sector continues to grow and flourish. As demand increases and funding slows down, organisations look for new and more innovative ways of working. With this, the importance of robust partnership working becomes ever more important, and the need for VAS as a forward thinking infrastructure lead supporting and developing these links is crucial.



The sector in Swindon makes an invaluable contribution to the lives of an enormous number of families and individuals who find themselves in need of help or support. Life events which can quickly become life changing events can affect us all. It may be illness, disability, starting a family, losing a job, losing a loved one or starting out on your own; the voluntary and community sector provides a range of essential services to help, advise and advocate.

Sanford House is a shining example of what happens when the voluntary sector comes together to make a difference. Managed by VAS and commissioned by Swindon Borough Council, Sanford House is growing into a vibrant hub working for the residents of Swindon. VAS's role in managing the building allows each organisation based here to focus on the direct delivery of excellent services, both elements being essential for its continued success.

As the frontline delivery partner in Sanford House, Citizens Advice has seen first-hand the dramatic increase in demand for services over the past 12 months, with more and more people seeking advice and support. The topics vary greatly but the beauty of having so many services under one roof is that we can usually find an answer and a way forward for people.

Alongside our voluntary sector partners, we would also like to pay tribute to our volunteers who are the lifeblood of many of our organisations, making it possible to continue provision for the residents and communities of Swindon. VAS's role in developing and supporting the sector to grow capacity, sustain itself and be heard is key to providing these varied opportunities for volunteers to keep making that contribution.

Claire Newport
Chief Executive
Citizens Advice Swindon

VAS Staff & Volunteers

September 2017

Staff

Richard Hill—Chief Executive Officer
Russ Francis—Development Manager
Seniz Mutlu—Development Manager
Hannah Parry—Development Officer
James Moss—Administration Officer
Shaz Qaddus—Finance Officer
Jonathan Harris—Facilities & Maintenance
Officer

Volunteers

Linda West—Reception Volunteer
Charmaine Fisher—Reception Volunteer
Naresh Ladhu—Reception Volunteer
Kristian Millington—Reception Volunteer
Elaleh Rezaei—Reception Volunteer
Shabbir Ahmad—Reception Volunteer
JB Gurung—Volunteer



*L-R: (Back row) James Moss, Kristian Millington, Shaz Qaddas
(Front row) Russ Francis, Seniz Mutlu, Hannah Parry, Richard Hill*

Photo credit: Keith Phillips

Board of Trustees

September 2017

Our Trustees have independent control over, and legal responsibility for, Voluntary Action Swindon's management and administration. They are volunteers who work collectively as a Board and take decisions in the interests of the charity and its objectives. All of our Trustees have a background in the voluntary and community sector in Swindon.

Tim Ward—Chair

Arthur Amos—Vice Chair

John Markey—Treasurer

Bob Barrett

David Bell

Ram Thiagarajah

Steve Henderson



*L-R: David Bell, John Markey, Tim Ward, Steve Henderson, Bob Barrett, Arthur Amos
Top: Ram Thiagarajah*

Photo credit: Pete Albanese

It is very pleasing to be able to reflect on a year that has seen great successes for VAS as shown in the CEO report that follows. This success has been based on the secure foundations the Trustees have worked hard to put in place.

We were able to confirm the appointment of Richard Hill as the permanent CEO after a rigorous process and he has proved his worth in providing positive leadership and direction for the organisation. He has ensured we deliver on all our commitments and established effective external relationships. This has had a significant and positive impact on our standing amongst our key stakeholders, particularly the local voluntary sector.

The Board will be revisiting our strategy following a period of discussion with members and other stakeholders. We will want to build on the success so far while ensuring that VAS continues to develop in a way that ensures VAS can continue to play a central role in supporting the Swindon voluntary sector to achieve maximum impact in addressing the needs of our communities.

I would like to express my thanks to our volunteers, staff and Trustees for their continued hard work, commitment and enthusiasm. I also want to express my appreciation to our partners, friends and supporters in Swindon and beyond for your continuing support.

I had the privilege of meeting with Lord Joel Joffe in my role as Chair of VAS and know that he will be greatly missed. A genuine and formidable person whose impact on VAS and on Swindon will not be forgotten.

Tim Ward

Chair

Voluntary Action Swindon



Photo credit: Pete Albanese

Chief Executive Officer's Report

Richard Hill

Welcome to our review of 2016/17.

In our Annual Review last year, and at our AGM, we set out how we had worked to stabilise VAS after what had been a very unsettling period for the organisation. I am pleased to report that we have consolidated that work and we have continued to make good progress during the last 12 months.

A key priority has been to balance our budget, given that we have seen net losses in our accounts in recent years (a £19k deficit in 14/15, and a £14k deficit in 15/16) and a subsequent sharp reduction in our Council grant in April 2016, which left a large budget gap to fill. The whole team has worked very hard to find ways to generate extra/alternative income sources and to reduce costs, with the result that we can report a net surplus of approaching £18k (before Sanford reinvestment as below) for the 2016/17 financial year.

Importantly, and for the first time, we generated a surplus managing Sanford House. That is good news for VAS, but also good news for all the organisations based at Sanford and their many service users, because our agreement with SBC means we pass back 60% of any surplus, for reinvestment into the facility. We are currently discussing, with the Sanford tenant organisations and SBC, how to best spend the £15.5k which is Sanford's share of the surplus this year. This can only help further improve what is already, as Claire Newport explains in her foreword to this review, a very strong service offering at Sanford House – one that is making a real difference to many Swindon residents in need.



Representatives of tenant organisations at Sanford House

Photo credit: Swindon Advertiser

This year has also been about restoring trust in VAS as an organisation that:

- consistently delivers on its service obligations
- makes a demonstrable difference in the community through its support to voluntary and community groups and organisations
- is worth continuing to support and invest in

Elsewhere in this review you'll read about some of the many things we have delivered and achieved during the year – and see what a few of the people and groups we have supported say about the help they got from VAS.

I just wanted to highlight a couple of examples. Firstly, I am struck by the number of organisations and groups (134) we have given information, training and advice to during the year. This covers areas such as funding, governance and organisational matters and it's the sort of help that people would struggle to obtain elsewhere. Just looking at funding advice, we have helped local charities and community groups secure over £875k worth of funds during the year – with most of that being money which has been brought into Swindon from outside the town.

Secondly, I've been very pleased by our work in Equality and Access. Our campaign work in this area has now got considerable traction and the City of Sanctuary, More in Common and Swindon 200 initiatives have generated widespread interest and high levels of engagement. Around 400 people have been directly involved in these campaigns – many more indirectly. The work, naturally, is ongoing, but working in partnership with other local community groups, charities and businesses, we're helping to make Swindon an even more inclusive and equal place.



*Swindon City of Sanctuary Launch Event, October 2016
Photo credit: Swindon Advertiser*

Looking forward, there remains much for us to do – with central and local government funding falling and demand for support for the vulnerable rising, there has never been more need for local VCS organisations, community groups and individuals to carry out their great work, supported by VAS wherever we can.

I will be working with our Trustee Board over the coming months to review and refine our strategy with the above challenges in mind. The sector survey we conducted, and the related focus groups sessions we ran during the year (more details on both these things can be found on page 14) will be valuable inputs to this process, but please do get in touch if you have other ideas as to where VAS should focus its work over the coming months and years.

In the meantime, some of our immediate objectives include:

- Increasing the frequency and quality of our communications/engagement with our members and other stakeholders
- Building further awareness of VAS and the difference that we and all in the VCS sector make
- Working with SBC, The Volunteer Centre, Involve and other interested parties to develop a new and even more effective volunteering strategy for Swindon
- Progressing the project to renovate the former caretaker's cottage at Sanford (with a view to it then providing much needed move on accommodation)
- Taking on administration and signposting work for the Safe And Independent Living (SAIL) project, working in conjunction with Dorset and Wiltshire Fire & Rescue service and various other agencies

Finally, as Tim Ward mentions in his report and as many of you will be aware, Lord Joel Joffe sadly passed away recently. Joel's contribution to Swindon (and well beyond) was enormous and he will be greatly missed. He was a great friend to, and supporter of, VAS and it was a huge privilege to work with him in recent times on a number of community engagement initiatives that he catalysed. We must continue that work and so that will be another key item on VAS's 'to do' list.

My thanks to our excellent staff, volunteers (who include our Trustees of course) and our many supporters for their dedication and commitment to VAS during the year. Here's to building on that and taking VAS from strength to strength in 2017/18!

Richard Hill

Chief Executive Officer

Voluntary Action Swindon





Swindon Community Conference & Swindon200

During this year we developed and launched Swindon200 – a new project, in partnership with the Swindon Equality Coalition, to promote equality and inclusion in the town, bring members of the community together and enable them to play a positive and active role in equality work.

The project was launched at the Swindon Community Conference held at the National Trust, which brought together over 90 people from over 60 local Community & Voluntary Sector organisations to hear presentations from various equality groups on a range of issues (pictured above).

At the conference, we launched the ‘Swindon Equality & Inclusion Charter’, a community charter which was developed by attendees on the day. The Swindon200 project has been developed as a structure for community engagement locally. To find out more, please visit

www.swindon200.uk.

Photo credit: Martin Parry

Swindon City of Sanctuary

During 2016-2017, we supported the development of a new campaign called Swindon City of Sanctuary, which is part of a national movement to create towns and cities across the UK that build a culture of welcome, inclusion and support for refugees and asylum seekers.

We supported the organisation of the launch event and two pop-up restaurants run by local refugees and asylum seekers who are visitors of The Harbour Project, which together over 250 people attended, and helped with publicity in their crucial first year. We also provided organisational advice and support including charity registration. The organisation has achieved a great amount in its first year with lots of momentum and support from the local community and we are pleased to have been involved and to have supported its development.



“We have received excellent support and advice from VAS to assist us with this change to our legal structure in what would otherwise have been a very daunting process. Swindon is very lucky to have the support services of VAS, especially at a time of increasing demand on the voluntary sector and decreasing statutory support for it. As an organisation we couldn’t achieve anything like we do without being able to call on VAS’s expertise.”

- Annie Vickers, the Harbour Project for Swindon Refugees and Asylum Seekers

Photo credits (top to bottom): Elmar Rubio; Swindon Advertiser; Martin Parry; Elmar Rubio.



#MoreInCommon

We organised an event called #MoreInCommon, which took place at The Parade in the town centre in October. We attracted people's attention through a range of performances from different cultures, gave out HOPE Not Hate magazines and other literature and managed to speak to over 100 people about the issues the campaign is trying to tackle.

Throughout the year, we engaged approximately 400 people in equality activity, including the Swindon City of Sanctuary launch, the Swindon200 Workshop, and the #MoreInCommon event.

Photo credit: Swindon Advertiser

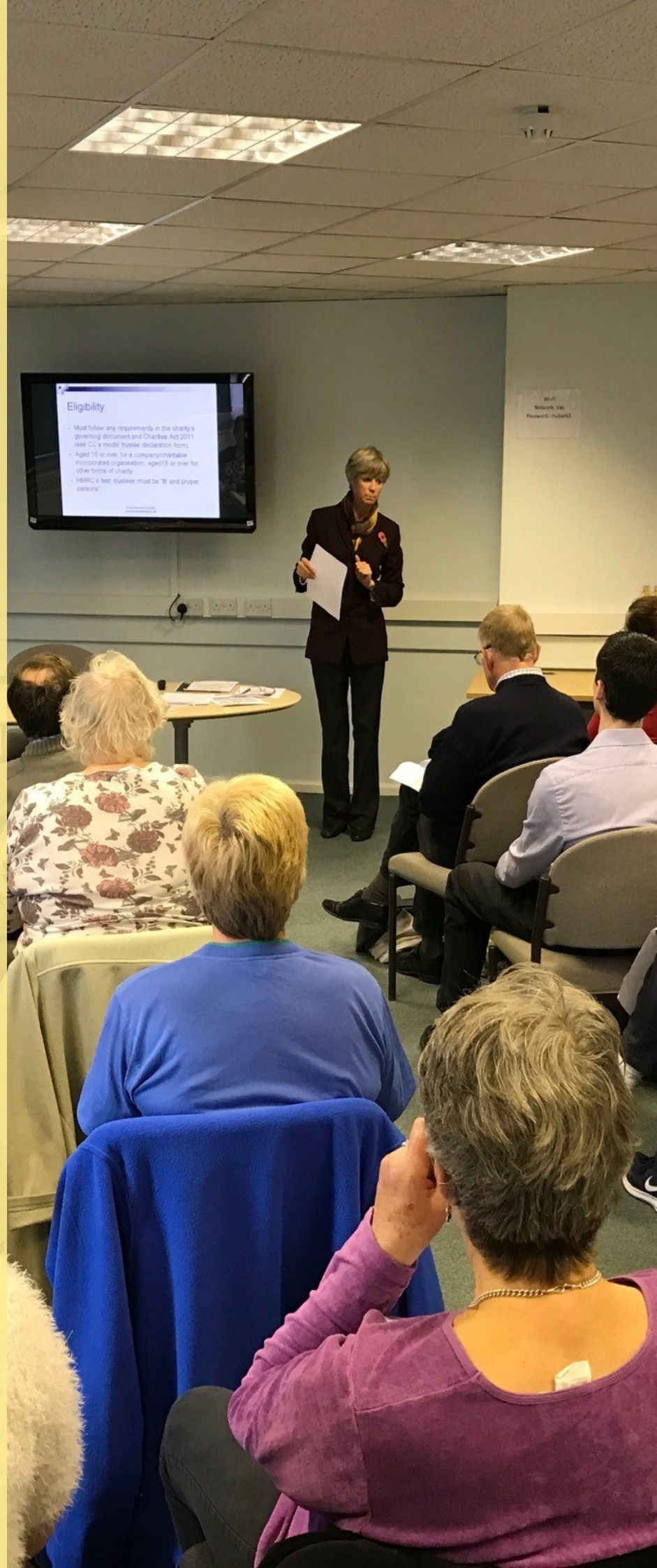
Funding & Governance Advice

We gave 134 local organisations funding and governance advice during the year. We helped support local charities and community groups to raise more than £875,000. Our governance work has included guiding local groups through the process of charity registration, policy advice, and resolving constitutional and operational issues.

We ran training courses on the roles and responsibilities of trustees, employment law and legal structures in the voluntary sector, and applying for grants from the Wiltshire Community Foundation.

“I engaged the assistance of VAS in September 2016 to support me in registering my enterprise as a Community Interest Company. The support I received helped me to ensure I had the correct governance procedures in place and supported me with the paperwork to complete the registration. This would have been a considerably more complicated process without the support from VAS which meant I could still dedicate some time to providing the service as well as taking care of this paperwork heavy procedure.”

- Martin Kelly,
Disability Experts CIC





Swindon Sports Forum is run by a committee of dedicated volunteers from a variety of local sports clubs. The mission of the Sports Forum is for sport to succeed and flourish in Swindon.

Voluntary Action Swindon plays a key role in the administration of the Sports Forum, ensuring that it is able to make grants to local sports clubs. 17 clubs received a total of £17,500 last year. These sports clubs have been able to purchase vital equipment that they wouldn't have otherwise been able to purchase, including sports equipment and a defibrillator.

Clubs receiving grants included Swindon Croquet Club, Sanford Link Table Tennis Club, Swindon Fencing, and Swindon Shock Basketball.

“VAS provides vital help to the Swindon Sports Forum through administrative support and ensuring the smooth day-to-day running of the group, including organising wider meetings, the AGM and focus group sessions.”

- Neil Bromley, Grants Officer, Swindon Sports Forum

Photo credit: Swindon Sports Forum

Voluntary & Community Sector Survey



VAS carried out a survey of the voluntary and community sector in Swindon in 2017, as part of a wider consultation with the local sector, which included several focus group sessions. The survey was launched on 11th April 2017, and closed on 11th May. A total of 146 responses were received, representing 111 organisations. Focus group sessions were held in October-November 2016 and were attended by 49 people representing various voluntary and community sector groups.

Some results from the survey:

- ♦ Volunteers are seen as no less essential than before, but organisations are increasingly struggling to recruit or retain them, possibly due to lacking resource.
- ♦ Expenditure for most organisations has increased over the past year, while nearly half reported that their income has remained static. Donations from individuals is the most common source of income for respondents. Public sector grants/contracts has reduced more than any other income stream over the last year.
- ♦ Respondents see their main training and development needs as fundraising and volunteer recruitment. Raising income to provide services is identified as the primary challenge.
- ♦ More than two-fifths of organisations reported that they have seen an increase in beneficiary numbers. In total, respondents reported that they have supported 342,963 people in the last twelve months.

The full survey report is available from our website—<http://vas-swindon.org>

Community Fair

The Swindon Community Fair was held at The Secret Garden in Queen's Park and provided space for over 15 local organisations to promote their services to local residents. This year's fair had a theme of 'wellbeing' and featured stalls by groups that fit into the '5 Ways to Wellbeing', a set of actions to improve personal wellbeing. Despite not being the best of weather days, 115 residents attended.



Stallholders reported that two thirds of visitors had not heard of their organisation before. They found it very useful to network with other groups, creating new contacts and relationships with plans to working together on projects in the future.

“Spoke to all groups and plan to work with two of them to combat loneliness in older people.”

“Plenty of time to talk to other charities. For me it was all about driving awareness opportunities.”

“Networking was useful as it will bring more members to the forum and it gives more info to our members.”

Sector Support

500+
news items
communicated
via VAS id

£875k
Funding secured
for local
organisations

150+
disclosures
processed through
our DBS service

136
people attended
our training
courses

The Role of Trustees: Duties and Responsibilities

Fire Safety

Understanding Legal Structures

Applying to the Wiltshire Community Foundation

Emergency First Aid at Work

The Effective Trustee

Employment Law Essentials for Voluntary Sector Employers

Reviewing and Strengthening Funding Applications

Drafting New Governing Documents

Policy Templates

29 Lunch Clubs Supported Through Network Meetings

Charity Registration

Finding Sources of Funding

Liaising with the Charity Commission and CIC Regulator

134

local groups received
advice on funding,
governance and
operational issues

Finance Report Summary

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 report, will be submitted to the Registrar of Companies and the Charity Commission.

This summary information may not contain sufficient information to give 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 - <http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk>.

VAS Accounts Summary: Year to 31 March 2017		
	2016-17	2015-16
	£,000	£,000
INCOME		
Rent	65	81
Printing	4	5
Training	2	2
Interest	1	2
Other ¹	5	7
PROJECTS/FUNDING		
SBC—Strategic Development	-	24
SBC—Community Sector Support	60	125
SBC—Sanford House	107	81
VCS—Involve	1	9
Other Income ²	22	-
Total Income	267	336

VAS Accounts Summary: Year to 31 March 2017		
	2016-17	2015-16
	£,000	£,000
EXPENDITURE		
Staff Costs	-148	-185
Other Costs ³	-99	-163
Audit Fees	-2	-2
Total Expenditure	-249	-350
Net Deficit/Surplus	18	-14
BALANCE SHEET		
	2016-17	2015-16
	£,000	£,000
Fixed Assets	90	90
Bank Accounts	213	188
Other Assets	6	7
Total	309	285
Liabilities	-26	-20
Net Funds	283	265

¹ Other includes income from our DBS checking and PAT testing services, and charges for advertising vacancies in VAS id.

² Other Income includes grants from the Joffe Charitable Trust and the Swindon Borough Council New Shoots grants scheme.

³ Other Costs includes admin and management staff, community print and publications, governance costs, and costs associated with training and conferences.

Some of the feedback we received last year...

"Thank you too for so much of your time and energy. It was good to speak to someone who knows what they are talking about and in plain language."

"I was fortunate to be on the recent First Aid Course and was very impressed as to the whole programme given by the lecturer. I recommended the whole experience to my club so much so that they are now seriously considering having 8 or so members take the course."

"Thank you so much, it's good to know we can rely on impartial people like you."

"VAS have always been there for advice, support and sign posting and most recently the Scrapstore is receiving support to enable us to move from a registered charity to a charitable incorporated organisation. This is a very difficult process and without their support there is no way the Scrapstore would be able to make the transition... The Scrapstore regularly accesses the services that VAS offers and I can honestly say I would not have been able to achieve as much as I have in my work for the Scrapstore without the support of VAS and their team."

- Olivia McCann, Swindon Children's Scrapstore

"Thank you again for your help reviewing the draft application. It really is greatly appreciated!"

Our Services

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.

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.

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.

Training Courses

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.

PAT Testing

VAS can provide a PAT testing service for all class 1 and 2 electrical equipment, including desktop and laptop computers, monitors, speakers, printers.

For more information about any of these services, please call us on 01793 538 398 or email info@vas-swindon.org

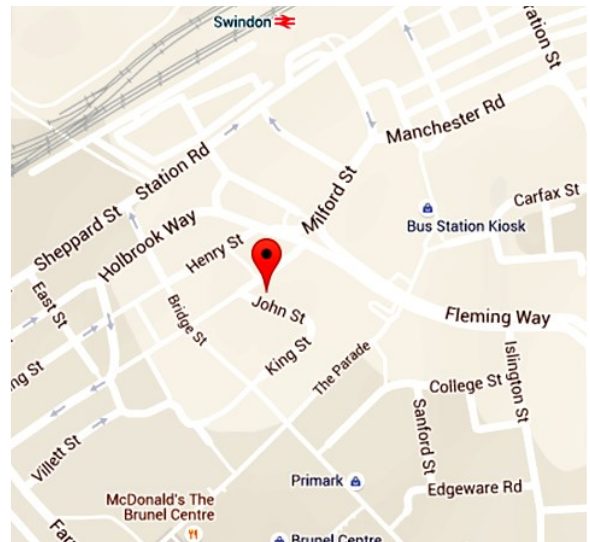
How to Find Us

Voluntary Action Swindon
1 John Street
Swindon
Wiltshire
SN1 1RT

Tel: 01793 538 398

Email: info@vas-swindon.org

Web: <http://vas-swindon.org>



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 (SN1 2BF) car parks.



<https://www.facebook.com/VoluntaryActionSwindon/>

<https://twitter.com/vaswindon>

<http://vas-swindon.org>



Special thanks to our funders:



The Joffe Charitable Trust

Front cover photo credit: Swindon Advertiser