



Lancaster District Community and Voluntary Solutions Business Plan: 2022-25



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Cover photograph: 'Ship' by Anna Gillespie - sculpture located at Half Moon Bay, Heysham. Photograph by Jill Anderson

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1. Introduction

People thrive in community with one another. Communities, if they are to flourish, require a thriving voluntary community, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) sector. That sector, in turn, requires supportive, bridging, infrastructure. Our strapline - 'supporting you to support your communities' - may be new, but LDCVS has been providing that infrastructure for many years.

We will support you, as an individual, to contribute to your local community, through the gift of time or money. We will support you, as an organisation to make our district - and your own working community - a better and a fairer place. We will support you, as a geographical, interest or faith-community, to articulate your needs and ensure that they are recognised and addressed in ways appropriate to you.

We, at LDCVS, help our members to overcome some critical challenges that the Voluntary Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) Sector faces. The first is around [funding](#) - we help to facilitate the right amount of funding for the right activities, distributed in a way that supports VCFSE organisations and our local communities. The second is around [volunteering](#) - we help our members to attract, develop and retain high quality, dedicated volunteers who, through citizen participation, make a difference in communities. The third is around how the [VCFSE Sector](#) is perceived and perceives itself - we help to enhance the reputation, professionalism, capacity and independence of our [members](#). The fourth is around how the VCFSE Sector [communicates](#), both internally and externally - we help our members to talk to each other, share knowledge, debate sometimes contentious issues and work together to create positive impact for communities. Working closely with [our partners](#), we raise the profile and amplify the voices of local community and voluntary organisations, ensuring that they are valued, understood by commissioners and properly resourced to tackle pressing social challenges.

In summary, we are an organisation that applies our skills and experience to enable others in our sector to maximise their social impact and to better attain their goals and aspirations. Most recently, the VCFSE sector has played a critical role in the COVID-19 pandemic response, and we have been pivotal in supporting that.

This business plan will guide our work in the year to come. In developing it we have reflected on what we have achieved since our formation, noting what we have done well and where we could improve. We have considered new ways of working that will better meet the needs of our membership and which aid our own sustainability. We have also considered the context in which we work. We have drawn on recent surveys into the needs of our stakeholders and considered the issues impacting on the VCFSE sector,

such as COVID-19 and changes in public sector funding. As part of that work we have refreshed our core values, and how we work as an organisation.

We are now more confident that we are doing the right things for the right reasons and in the right way. Our vision is for an independent, thriving, diverse, innovative and resilient VCFSE sector providing high quality support to communities across our district that makes a positive difference to peoples' lives. This business plan sets out the role we will play, over the coming year, in achieving that. LDCVS has been in Lancaster District for almost 50 years and, with your support, we have our sights set on 100!

2. Our history and operating context

LDCVS operates from the Cornerstone, on Dalton Square in the centre of Lancaster. The premises are central to the city and accessible by all forms of transport, with office space and a fully equipped training room.

Find out more about our staff and volunteers, including our Board of Trustees, in Appendix Two.

Our History

LDCVS was founded in 1972, as one of a national network of Councils of Community Service (the precursors to Councils of Voluntary Service). Its objective was “to promote any charitable purpose for the benefit of the community in the Lancaster District boundaries, to promote and organise co-operation in the achievement of the above purposes and to bring together representatives of the statutory authorities and voluntary organisations engaged in the furtherance of the above purposes”.

The organisation had few funds and no premises at first. By the end of the 1980s a volunteer bureau had been set up, a Chief Officer had been appointed and the organisation was enjoying a period of stability and growth. In 2008 we secured a 5-year funding package from the Big Lottery BASIS Fund, which enabled expansion of our development work. Since then, that work has continued to be funded by Lancashire County Council and by Lancaster City Council.

In June 2013 we moved to our current premises. Our staff team expanded and diversified, as did the breadth of work and projects we tackled. Since then, it is fair to say that LDCVS, like many local agencies, has come under significant pressure as external funding has reduced whilst, at the same time, the needs of the community and consequent demand for our services have increased significantly. This was evidenced most recently during the dreadful lockdown days of 2020 and 2021. However, through adversity comes strength and we look forward to our future as a lean, fit and effective organisation ready to take on the challenges of recovery in the post-pandemic era.

Our operating context

Lancaster District is the fourth largest, and most northerly, district of Lancashire, in the north west of England. Covering an area of 565km², it borders with Wyre, River Valley, Craven and South Lakeland Councils and includes both rural and urban areas. Of the total population of 144,000, over 100,000 people live in the urban area comprising Lancaster, Morecambe and Heysham. There has been steady growth in the population of Lancaster District since the 1970s with a corresponding increase in demand for services.



Lancaster District has a below average proportion of residents from Black and Minority Ethnic groups and religious affiliations other than Christian. At the 2011 UK census, 65.9% of Lancaster district's population reported themselves as Christian, 1.3% Muslim, 0.4% Buddhist, 0.3% Hindu, 0.1% Jewish, and 0.1% Sikh. 24.5% had no religion, 0.5% had an alternative religion and 7.1% did not state their religion.

At the 2011 census, of the 57,822 households in the city, 33.5% were married couples living together, 31.9% were single-person households, 7.8% were co-habiting couples and 10.0% were lone parents. These figures are similar to the national averages.

The age profile in Lancaster District is skewed towards people between 18 - 25, due to the presence here of two higher education institutions: Lancaster University and the University of Cumbria. As is the picture nationally, the population is ageing, with the most significant growth in the district estimated to be in the 65+ age group, which will account for 32% of the population by 2037.

Lancaster district is in the 20% most deprived lower-tier local authority area, with the West End of Morecambe ranking as one of the most disadvantaged communities in England, when measured by poverty, unemployment, poor health and low educational attainment.

There are approximately 580 VCFSE organisations in Lancaster District, of which 463 are registered charities. However, many more informal organisations exist below the radar, making it likely - according to Third Sector Trends research - that the overall population of VCFSE organisations is in the region of 1200-1500.

Approximately one third of the VCFSE organisations in Lancaster District operate at village or neighbourhood level, slightly more than that within one local authority, with a quarter working across the whole of the North West of England and the remainder working in more than one region, nationally or internationally.

Over 70% of the organisations that responded to the above survey have an income below £50,000 (the majority of which have no reserves). Organisations resource their activities from a range of sources of income or in-kind support - with grants, gifts and donations and subscriptions featuring large and few organisations reliant on earned income.

The above research suggests that there is a generally lower level of participation in the delivery of public sector contracts in Lancaster and District than elsewhere in the North West with awareness of such opportunities quite limited. That insight, amongst others outlined above, determines what we seek to do and how we set about that.

3. Our Mission, Strategic Aims and Values

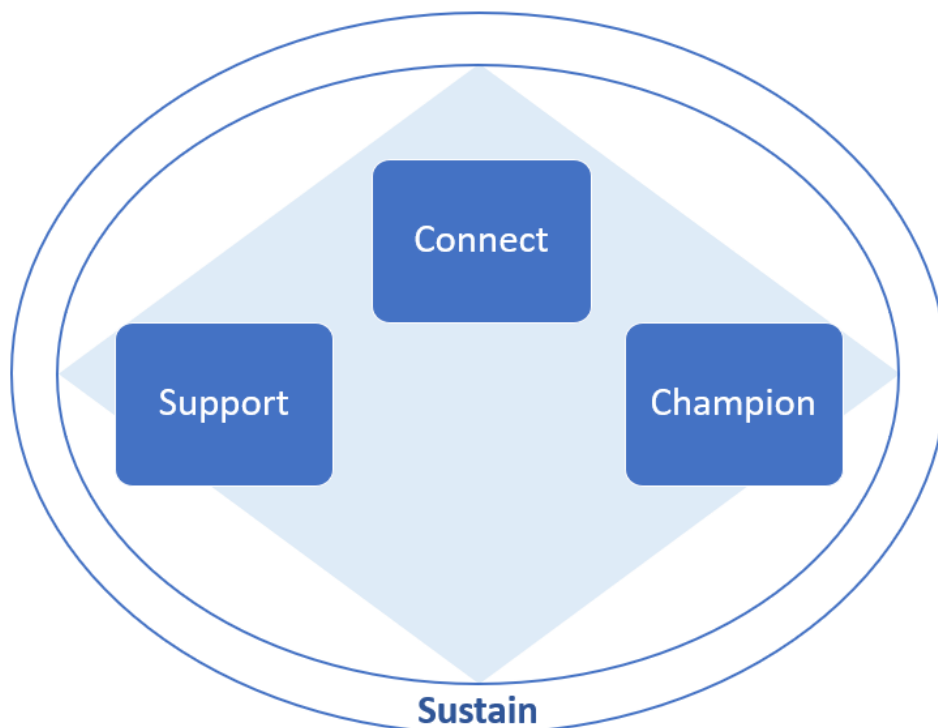
Mission Statement

LDCVS exists to support, connect and champion the voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) sector in Lancaster District.

Strategic aims

LDCVS aims:

- to **support** the sector: incubating, developing and sustaining voluntary and community organisations and enabling them, in turn, to support the communities that they care about.
- to **connect** the sector: forging links between individuals, communities and groups, and between the sector as a whole and other partners.
- to **champion** the sector: ensuring that both its achievements and its challenges are recognised
- to **sustain** ourselves as an organisation, and stay open to new learning



Our values

The work of LDCVS is guided by a set of shared values.

Independence: We are an independent voice for the Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise sector, championing its vital role in Lancaster District

Collaboration: We believe in partnership, in the sharing of knowledge, expertise and resources, and the importance of building trust across geographical, organisational, cultural and sectoral boundaries

Social Justice: We value the diversity of the sector and work to promote equality, diversity and inclusion.

Empowerment: We seek to enable communities, organisations and networks to become strong, independent and self-sustaining.

Learning: We believe that all of us can grow, learn and develop throughout our lives but often need help to do so.

Participation: We champion the principle of voluntary action, believing strongly in the benefits it brings to individuals and communities in our District.

Quality: We put quality at the heart of all our activities.

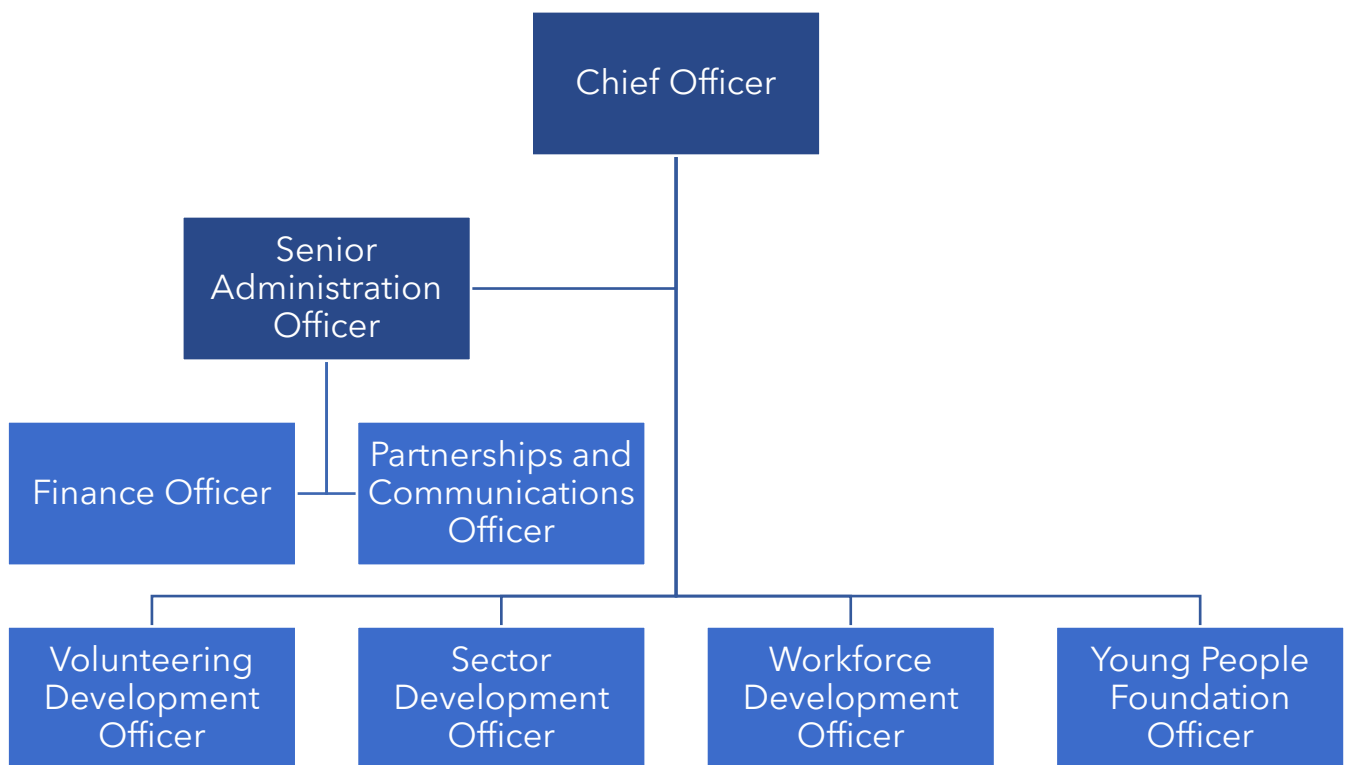
4. Our activities and why they matter

To achieve our four aims, our staff, supported by our volunteers and trustees, engage in:

- organisational support, development, training and fund management
- voluntary sector and community development and partnership working
- advocacy, representation and leadership development
- administration, communications, finance and governance

The above tasks - which interconnect - are carried out by our core team, supported by two defined work strands within LDCVS: our ***Volunteer Centre*** and the ***Bay Foundation***.

Organisational structure [as at November 2021]



4.1 Organisational support, development, training and fund management

LDCVS has, over fifty years, developed a unique understanding of the local VCFSE sector – its needs, its challenges and its potential. We have around 446 organisations on our database, many of which are small and specialist organisations, supporting disadvantaged communities. They need our support because they seek:

- knowledge and skills in key areas such as project governance, bid writing, communications and safeguarding. We provide advice and training and signpost to other providers.
- the financial resources to remedy the above through external training. We help organisations to access financial support and keep the cost of our own services low.
- the resources to enable them to plan ahead. We keep organisations and individuals in touch through our weekly newsletters, and are well placed to support them in forward planning.
- the time and resources to engage, themselves, in partnership forums. We act as convenors, brokers and advocates, hosting the conversations that matter.
- the capacity or the networks to promote their successes beyond their immediate stakeholders or beneficiaries. We help to demonstrate the value of the sector, highlighting the positive change that VCFSE organisations make within our district.

We also provide support with payroll and day to day administration (see under 4 below).

Volunteer Centre

For over 20 years, Lancaster District CVS has promoted volunteering – ensuring that it makes a positive difference for the individual volunteers themselves, volunteer involving organisations and their end-recipients. Our Volunteer Centre provides a brokerage service that matches local people to organisations and volunteering opportunities; develops volunteering opportunities and raises the profile of volunteering throughout our communities. We ensure that good practice guidelines are understood and observed wherever volunteering is taking place: for example, in relation to safeguarding, risk assessment and expenses. The need for such support has only increased over the past year. As local VCFSE organisations emerge from the restrictions imposed by COVID-19, volunteers will be needed to help people to connect with one another, their communities and the causes that they care about.

Bay Foundation

LDCVS has, since its inception, worked actively with funders, channelling hundreds of thousands of pounds to tackle local issues. Our grants programme is aimed primarily at smaller organisations which comprise over 80% of the VCFSE sector but receive less than 5% of its annual income (NCVO Civil Society Almanac 2018). LDCVS has been pivotal in ensuring that all organisations bidding and in receipt of grants meet robust criteria (relating to health and safety, child protection and insurance for example). Importantly, this has increased their capacity to compete for other opportunities.

The Covid-19 pandemic has presented the VCFSE sector with new and unprecedented challenges. Revenue has reduced just at the time when demand for support, from both communities and the public sector, has increased. Drawing on our years of experience in administering grants, we launched the 'The Urgent Response Fund - Coronavirus' fundraising appeal (see: <https://www.totalgiving.co.uk/appeal/coronavirus>) to support organisations working to mitigate the impact of the pandemic in our district. With support and investment from Lancaster City Council, the Westminster Foundation, the Eric Wright Charitable Trust, the National Farmers Union, the Francis C. Scott Trust and the generous public, we raised over £80,000 and we have allocated over £42,000 to over 50 organisations.

Funders can strengthen charities, increase their impact and change the lives of beneficiaries. In our experience, funders who work with us begin to understand the needs and approaches of local organisations and how they work. This has a knock-on effect on the lives of beneficiaries—good grant-making improves more lives. For example, working in partnership with Lancaster City Council, Lancaster Business Improvement District, Lancaster and Morecambe Area Police, we set up the Street Aid initiative - a project to support homeless people become independent. Through our recently launched LDCVS Bay Foundation, we will build on our experience to date, structuring grants in such a way as to create the greatest impact.

4.2 Voluntary sector and community development and partnership working

Lancaster District CVS has a strong history of leading partnerships of local VCFSE organisations to address issues faced by people living in our communities - whether they be youth unemployment (our See Hear Our Unheard teenagers project) or tackling loneliness and isolation (Strengthening Communities project) or family education (our Community Learning Network) and Digital Inclusion (Our REACH IT project).

Working in partnership is at the heart of what we do. We are proud to be involved in community-led partnerships such as Creative Civic Change programme in the West End of Morecambe, for which we are the Locally Trusted Organisation.

Partnership meetings we attend or contribute to include:

Health & Wellbeing Partnership Board
Communities Together
Community Action Network
Food Poverty Action Group
Lancaster District Skills Board
Lancaster & Morecambe College Governors
Future in Mind
Community Safety Partnership
Reducing Offending Board
Coastal Communities
Lost Art of Living
Lancaster District Children's Trust
Children & Young People's Emotional Health Board
Transforming Communities Agenda
Morecambe Bay Poverty Truth Commission
Older People's Forum
Voluntary Sector Alliance
Lancashire Association for CVSs
Chamber of Commerce
Health Innovation Lab
City of Sanctuary
Collaborations for Leadership in Applied Health
Mental Health Forum
West End Morecambe Partnership
Art of Connecting Communities
Integrated Care Communities
Creative West End
Integrated Care Partnership
Morecambe Bay Dementia Alliance Group
Mobilising Communities
Sustainable Food Lancaster
Population Health Strategic Group
Community Safety Partnership

We initiated a pilot in 2019 - an approach based on the Community Action Network model - to look at how communities can organise themselves in a 'place-based' way. This included mapping all small and specialist organisations in a given neighbourhood, training people in the [Art of Hosting Conversations that Matter](#) and working with local residents to create practical linkages between organisations and improve support. Organisations involved included health and wellbeing services, neighbourhood police teams, voluntary and community groups, local primary schools, local authorities and education providers. Since 2019, we have expanded the Community Action network to encompass three disadvantaged neighbourhoods and we aim to increase that to five.

We are well placed to support public sector agencies too. Because we are trusted by local communities, we are able to gather information that the public and private sectors do not have access to. We save the public sector time and money by providing a single front door to the sector, not just as a 'provider', but as a partner in coproduction of services, engaging local stakeholders and amplifying the voice of communities (for example through quarterly forums and special interest groups).

4.3 Advocacy, representation and leadership development

We facilitate and broker opportunities, and help to break down boundaries between the VCFSE sector and partners across the region. As facilitator of the VCFSE Leadership forum we help organisations to share knowledge and experience, to debate their differences and unite around a shared vision. We work with the Health and Wellbeing partnership and the Integrated Care Partnership to ensure that VCFSE leaders are represented within the Bay Health infrastructure. We have worked hard on developing an action plan and a Memorandum of Understanding between the VCFSE and public sectors.

Together with our partners, we aim to achieve:

- The inclusion of smaller micro / community groups in dialogue, co-design and collaboration between the sectors, and a commitment to co-production with local people.
- The strengthening of relationships between public sector staff and VCFSE staff and volunteers at all levels, with a view to improving outcomes for local people.
- Joined up intelligence - giving VCSE organisations better access to data and 'market intelligence' and ensuring that VCFSE knowledge informs public sector intelligence functions.
- meaningful VCFSE involvement in public sector transformational programmes and collaborations, such as: the Bay Deal, Bay Health Care Partners, Morecambe Bay Curriculum, Community Wealth Building, Mental Health Transformation - ensuring that these programmes build on, and do not duplicate, the work of the sector.
- Acknowledgement of the VCFSE sector's success in delivering on Strategies such as Community Conversations, Tackling Poverty etc, together with opportunities for further work.
- A positive procurement strategy to maximise the effectiveness of commissioning processes with respect to the VCFSE sector.
- Arrangements whereby larger VCFSE organisations use their significant resources to foster collaboration within the VCFSE sector and with other partners, and provide support to smaller organisations.

4.4 Administration, communications, finance and governance

Effective administrative, communication, finance and governance systems underpin the activity outlined above. These are both central aspects both of our own organisation and to the support that we provide to the wider sector. Backed by our expertise and in-depth knowledge of HMRC and Charity Commission requirements, we offer book-keeping, independent examinations, and all-inclusive payroll services at reasonable prices. As the Trusted Local Organisation we provide administrative support for the West End Morecambe and Creating Civic Change programmes, for example. We also advise upon questions of governance (see under 4.1 above).

5. Our plan

Strategic Aim 1: To ensure that our members are well supported and resourced

Achievement of this aim is dependent on ensuring that funding for the sector is both accessible and directed to where it is most needed. We will help funders to develop their knowledge of our local communities and their needs, and of how best to target resources to address those. We will provide support to VCFSE organisations in turn: telling them what funding is available and aiding their success in applying for it.

The VCFSE sector is dependent on the contribution of its volunteers. We will make local citizens aware both of specific volunteering opportunities and of the wider benefits of participation. We will support VCFSE organisations to attract, develop, support and retain those volunteers.

We will continue to be centrally involved in promoting the professionalism of the sector, through training and capacity building – for both paid staff and volunteers, including trustees – across all areas, including new developments such as social prescribing.

Strategic Aim 2: To connect together communities, the VCFSE sector and support agencies

As a district, we can only be successful in tackling entrenched problems, such as poverty, if we understand, and are able to work together to address, underlying inequalities. The VCFSE sector has a vital role to play. To achieve this aim, we will continue to create and contribute to forums for the exploration and discussion of the complex challenges we face, ensuring that all voices – not just the loudest – can be heard. We will continue to facilitate the Voluntary Sector Leadership Forum and expand our involvement with Community Action Networks and with new developments in population health. We will also help to develop skills – amongst VCFSE sector staff and volunteers – in collaborative working and peer mentoring.

Strategic Aim 3: To champion the VCFSE sector

Championing the VCFSE sector means more than just publicising its achievements and its work. It means harnessing our sector's collective power and pushing for the best environment for its survival. As a VCFSE infrastructure body, we will continue to develop through research, and promote, an understanding of the unique contribution that the sector makes to promoting community wellbeing and public health. We will work with our members to build stronger relationships with decision makers – ensuring that, in the formulation of all public policy, the VCFSE is recognised as a strategic partner. We aim to strengthen the sector's ability to effect change in the District; working with other

infrastructure bodies (local, regional and national) to ensure that both its achievements and its challenges are recognised.

Strategic Aim 4: To be a sustainable organisation, open to new learning

Achievement of all our aims is dependent on our development of a sustainable funding model for our own organisation. We will ensure the wellbeing of our own staff and volunteers through managing all aspects of our operations effectively and by rigorously maintaining an inclusive, fair and open-minded culture in our workplace.

6. How we will know that our plan has been achieved

For each of our strategic aims, we have identified a number of indicators, which will enable our staff and Board members to understand how well that aim has been achieved.

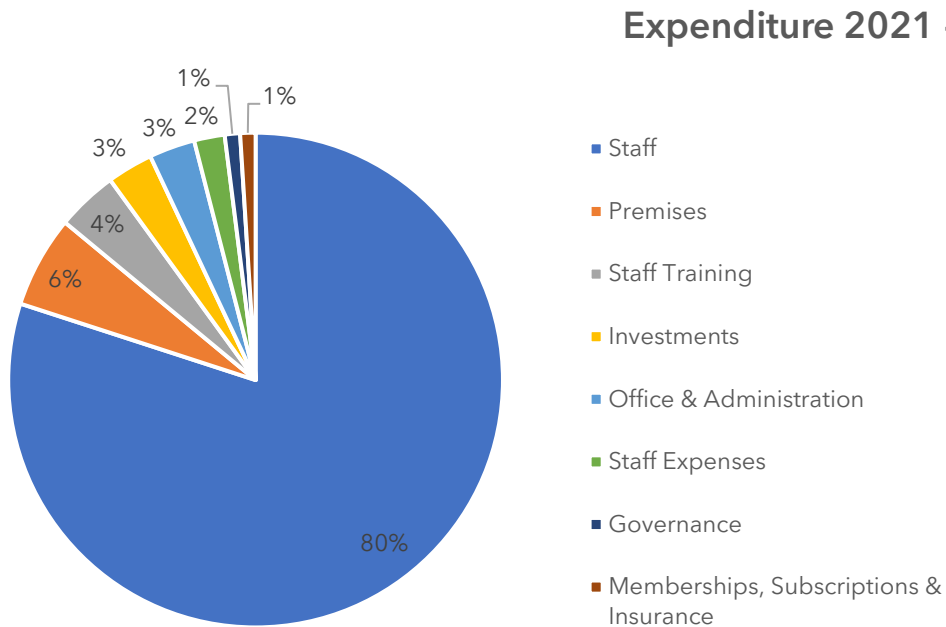
For example, we feel that we will have a good sense of whether our strategic aim one (support for the sector) has been achieved if we can see evidence that an Insights report has been created and communicated, of regular bulletins and that they are being actively read by members, of an increase in our volunteer numbers, of an increase in the profile of and engagement with our leadership forum and of the existence of a clear sector training programme and funding strategy.

The indicators that we have developed – along with our progress on our action plan as a whole – will be reviewed as part of our ongoing staff supervision and appraisal processes, and through reports to our trustees at Board meetings.

We look forward to sharing our achievements with our members, with whom we actively welcome engagement. Please contact us if you would like to know more about our outcome measures for the coming year.

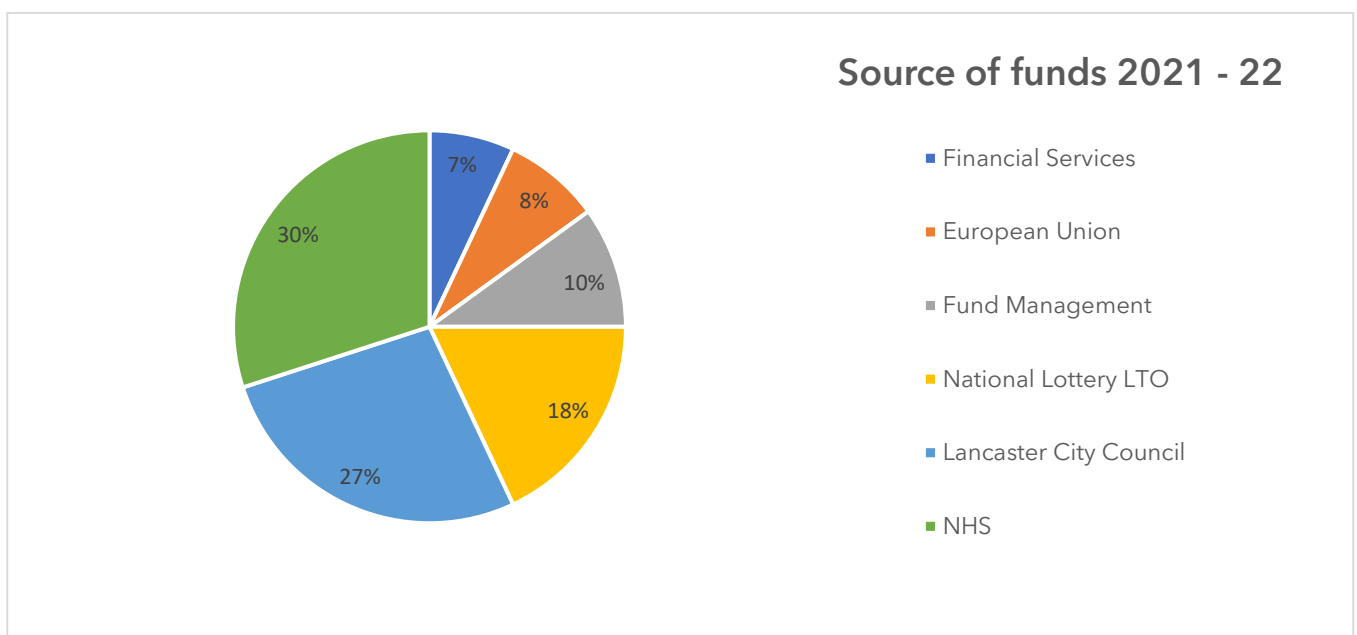
7. LDCVS expenditure and where the money will come from

The vast majority (80%) of our expenditure is on staffing. The breakdown of the remaining 20% can be seen in the chart below.



Just over half of our income (56%) comes from public bodies, with the remainder coming from charities (17%) and local government (27%).

The NHS and Lancaster City Council are our major funders, with other income sources shown below:



8. The risks we face

Our board and staff team are engaged in a continual process of identifying, evaluating and managing risks. We judge that the highest risks to our organisation and its operation lie in the area of income.

1. The greater part of our revenue comes from a small number of income providers.
2. Our funded contracts are time limited (6 months for example)
3. Funders hesitate to contribute to the overheads and indirect expenses that underpin the work we do.
4. Our pattern of income receipt is highly irregular whereas our pattern of expenditures is very regular. There is a consequent cashflow risk.

Other risks derive from the fact that - despite our long engagement in the district - the importance of infrastructure support is not well understood. Moreover, we work within a competitive, and ever shifting, operational context. The COVID-19 Pandemic has impacted in both predictable and unpredictable ways upon LDCVS itself and the organisations and communities that we support. Although the demand for our services is high and increasing, our staff team undertake their complex work without the benefit of job security.

To mitigate the risks outlined above, we strive actively to:

- diversify our funding sources and increase our reserves in order to facilitate a smoother cash flow.
- refine our offer to our existing membership and develop new areas of work within communities.
- improve how we communicate our key aims and purpose - through our new website, for example.
- enhance how we capture and promote both the work that we ourselves do and that of other organisations in the sector.
- strive to complement the work of other organisations in the district, avoiding duplication of effort and resources.

We actively welcome dialogue about how we can further mitigate the risks we face, many of which are shared by our member organisations.

How you can connect with and support us

Thank you for reading this plan.

Our success in achieving our aims and objectives is contingent on our relationship with our members and our partners. We would actively welcome your involvement, and any comments on this plan.

You can visit us in person:

Lancaster District CVS is based at:
The Cornerstone, Sulyard Street, Lancaster LA1 1PX

Visit our new website: www.lancastercvs.org.uk

Email us: hello@lancastercvs.org.uk

Phone us: (01524) 555900

Follow us on social media:

[facebook.com/LancasterCVS](https://www.facebook.com/LancasterCVS)

twitter.com/LancasterCVS

Help to shape the future of LDCVS, by joining as a [member](#). That way, you will receive our regular bulletins and invitations to our meetings and events.

We are always on the lookout for volunteers and trustees too and can provide support for those who are new to these roles. Get in touch to find out about our current vacancies.

Appendix: Our Staff Team

Below are details of our current staff team. To find out more about our Board of trustees, visit our new [website](#).

Yak Patel, Chief Officer

Yak manages and leads our team. He is the chair of the VCFSE Leadership forum, a chair of the Health & Well-being partnership board, a representative on the Integrated Care Partnership, Director for the Lancashire Association for CVS', Coordinator of the Community Action Network project and Vice-Chair of the Children and Young People Multi-agency Forum.

Mark Waddington, Connecting Communities Development Officer

Mark manages the Volunteer Centre and the Workforce Development program. He is also our lead contact for Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) queries and writes our regular bi-weekly column for the Lancaster Guardian.

Sharon Phillips, Connecting Communities Development Officer

Sharon provides Business Development Support for VCSFE organisations in the Lancaster District, including information and advice on organisational structure and governance, funding, recruitment and support for developing a business strategy.

Shweta Pankhadiwala, Finance Officer

Shweta manages payroll, bookkeeping and independent examination services. She also provides voluntary financial advice to charity organisations & groups.

Nick Smith, Senior Administrative Officer

Nick supports staff and volunteers by running back-office functions for membership, IT, finance, and human resources. He also manages the office and helps to coordinate new projects.

Tobi Ogunpehin, Communications & Partnerships Officer

Tobi develops and implements communication strategies across channels and manages our website content. She also engages with members and manages our overall membership experience.