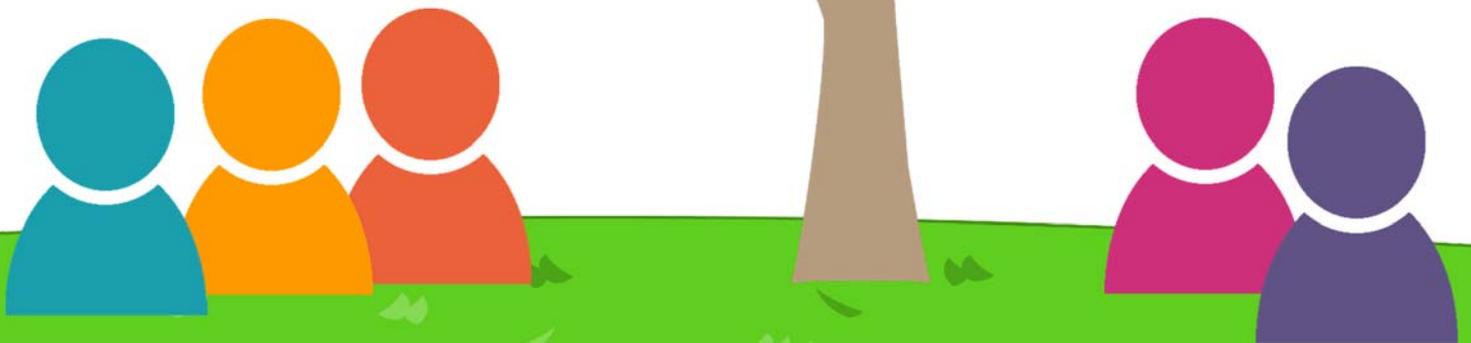


# Communities 1<sup>st</sup>

Strategic Plan

2019 – 2022



Working with you to  
make a bigger difference

# Strategic Plan

Community Central St Albans (previously the CVS for St Albans District) and Community Hertsmere delivered a valued service to all stakeholders – members, clients and partners. The combined feedback and reports by staff, volunteers, trustees and stakeholders and the recent merger to become Communities 1st has guided the development of this new strategic plan.

As a newly merged organisation, together with a rapidly changing world where our sector continues to face many challenges and take on new opportunities, it is highly appropriate that Communities 1st has undertaken a process of reviewing and planning for the next three years.

Our strategic plan is underpinned by our Vision, Mission and Values which drives all that we do. It is a plan for our members, for our strategic partners across all sectors, for our funders, our staff, volunteers and trustees.

## Our Strategic Objectives

Four strategic objectives will determine our programmes of work over the next three years. Our commitment to embedding impact practice in our work will provide a framework by which we can judge our success in their delivery. Each objective is supported by a series of outcomes which specifies the changes we want to see, our priorities for the next three years and how we will achieve them.

## Operational Plan

Our strategy is supported by an annual operational plan which sets out the detailed work plan in support of our four key goals. It describes the activity we will undertake, the outputs we plan to deliver but importantly how we will assess and measure the impact of our work. Our annual plan will be agile and responsive to the external environment and we will continually assess our work, its relevance to the sector and the need to develop new services as the demand and external environment dictates.

We gratefully acknowledge the efforts of our members, partners, funders, volunteers, trustees, staff and colleagues across all sectors and thank them for their invaluable and ongoing contributions to Communities 1st achievements – now and in the future.

**Stuart Nagler MBE**  
Chair

**Sarah Yexley**  
Vice-Chair

**Stephen Craker**  
Chief Executive

## Our Vision

*Working to build inclusive, empowering and vibrant local communities*

## Our Mission:

To work with people across all sectors to make a positive and sustained impact on the wellbeing of local people through Support, Knowledge, Voice, Infrastructure and Innovation.

## Our ethos:

Our ethos is one of service – to the individuals, groups, and institutions that want to use their energy and efforts to do something positive for themselves and others.

Our values are:

- ✓ **Inclusive** – people are at the heart of our organisation. By treating everyone fairly and understanding their diverse needs and strengths, we can serve them better and provide services that positively impact their lives.
- ✓ **Forward-thinking** – we search for solutions and ideas that overcome the challenges faced by our members, customers, communities and partners.
- ✓ **Trustworthy** – we are open and honest, with a friendly, enthusiastic and energetic way of working which is true to what we stand for.
- ✓ **Professional** – we aim to lead the way through our knowledge and expertise, investing for a strong future and excelling in all we do to provide the best possible standards of service.
- ✓ **Collaborative** – we work in partnership with our members, customers, colleagues, local communities and other experts, bringing everyone together to achieve more.
- ✓ **Independent** – we are an independent, impartial voice and advocates strongly on behalf of the voluntary sector to statutory bodies.

## Voluntary Sector definition

In the context of this document, the term 'voluntary sector' encompasses the breadth and diversity of voluntary action and includes: voluntary organisations; community groups; charities; faith groups engaged in voluntary and social action; non-profit initiatives; and social enterprise organisations.

## Our Role

- **Leadership** – offer ‘collaborative’ leadership, that enables people to work together effectively to achieve shared goals, benefiting from a pool of skills, knowledge and resources and building trust through action.
- **Empowering Voice** – enable communities to be heard and to influence - enabling the views and needs of local communities to be expressed and shared widely and to influence policy and practice.
- **Make Connections** – as a catalyst and enabler (a collector, distributor, creator and interpreter) of relationships and ideas across boundaries of all kinds (including organisational, geographic, sectoral and cultural).
- **Support and Development** – enabling voluntary action and supporting voluntary sector organisations to respond to the needs and aspirations of local people and communities.
- **Enable community resilience** - through understanding what works and doing our part to enable residents to take voluntary action that strengthens resilience, builds social capital and provides a public benefit.
- **Service and project delivery** - that support local individuals, businesses and community groups
- **Demonstrate impact** - We help organisations to demonstrate their impact and we demonstrate the impact of the sector overall

## Our Principles

- We are led by Values
- We are ready to speak out and challenge
- We take “positions” on issues only when these relate directly to our Vision and Mission
- We acknowledge conflicts of interest and the difficulty of balancing competition with neutrality
- We relate to our local communities, acknowledging their differences
- Our charitable activity benefits our local communities, but we sell products and services more widely
- We are willing to make changes in order to respond to changing circumstances
- We are clear about the differences between our membership offer, our selective initiatives and our trading
- We will involve partners, service users and intended beneficiaries in design and delivery
- In securing resources, we will be pragmatic and opportunistic
- We will be pragmatic and opportunistic in securing resources, and ensure that those resources, and any surplus from our trading activities will be used to support our mission.

# Looking to the future: Strategic Plan 2019-2022

While acknowledging significant positive progress of both Community Central St Albans and Community Hertsmere, we are firmly focused on what Communities 1st needs to do, and getting on with it. There is much to be done:

- Building and sustaining strong local voluntary sector infrastructure at a neighbourhood level in partnership with our public sector partners
- The growing opportunity to show how the sector can facilitate individuals to make a contribution and communities to be engaged
- The requirement to work with the accelerating commissioning agenda to protect and promote the sector's interests and opportunities
- The need to engage with emerging issues and demonstrate the contribution of the voluntary sector, particularly in tackling inequalities, for example the increasingly devolving and personalised health and social care services.
- To secure Communities 1st's sustainability.

## Our Strategic Aims and Objectives

### 1. **A more independent, effective and sustainable voluntary sector**

Build capacity in the local voluntary and community sector through a range of high-quality specialist services and resources enabling them to maximise their impact and sustainability.

### 2. **Improved access to volunteering and volunteers**

Work towards ensuring that all local people have access to excellent and inclusive volunteering information and brokerage services and that all local voluntary sector organisations have access to excellent and inclusive volunteer management support services.

### 3. **Individuals and communities are more connected, supported & independent and have enhanced wellbeing**

Encourage, facilitate and develop opportunities available for local people to enable individuals to be as independent as possible. Independent people have the best chance of being healthy, happy and safe.

### 4. **Our own organisation is developed and strengthened, in order to deliver maximum results**

To be a strong organisation, balancing our social purpose and our sustainable focus. As a financially viable organisation we want an excellent reputation for delivering high quality services for local people, member organisations and communities.

## **Objective 1. A more independent, effective and sustainable voluntary Sector**

Build capacity in the local voluntary and community sector through a range of high-quality specialist services and resources enabling them to maximise their impact and sustainability

### **We will work towards ensuring that:**

- ✓ Voluntary sector organisations across the districts of St Albans and Hertsmere have access to seamless, accessible, effective and appropriate support
- ✓ Public and private sector partners are fully equipped to engage effectively with the voluntary sector and are consistently held to account for doing so
- ✓ Local voluntary sector organisations have access to a range of high quality directly delivered back-office functions which enable them to focus their resources on their organisational and charitable aims
- ✓ The voluntary sector effectively articulates the experiences of its service users in a manner which positively influences public policy and practice and which improves the quality of life for local people.

### **For example, we will:**

- ✓ Help organisations to be well-led and well-governed, including delivering a range of network and peer support programmes and tools providing best practice for managing community activity
- ✓ Create opportunities for voluntary sector organisations to explore a range of appropriate business models, including the provision of advice and support around collaboration, merger, consortia working and social enterprise
- ✓ Support the development of partnerships to bid for public service contracts and/or to undertake projects that are of value to organisations and the community.

### **Impact:**

- ✓ Voluntary sector organisations report long term sustainability and financial security
- ✓ Help with governance, funding and support are readily available at key stages of development
- ✓ The voluntary sector has the capacity, means and understanding to play a full part in influencing decision making
- ✓ Local policy makers routinely invite participation from the voluntary sector as a part of decision making and fund the process adequately.

## **Objective 2. Improved access to volunteering and volunteers**

Work towards ensuring that all local people have access to excellent and inclusive volunteering information and brokerage services.

Local voluntary sector organisations have access to excellent and inclusive volunteer management support services.

### **We will work towards ensuring that:**

- ✓ Local people have access to excellent and inclusive volunteering information and brokerage services
- ✓ Local voluntary sector organisations have access to excellent and inclusive volunteer management support services
- ✓ A wide range of volunteer opportunities are available to encourage a diverse volunteer base which is representative of the local community, incl. businesses.

### **For example, we will:**

- ✓ Develop and deliver a range of projects and campaigns to ensure the profile of volunteering is maintained which enable individuals to take part in volunteering and are valued for their contribution
- ✓ Deliver an information, advice and support service to those involving volunteering activity within their work covering all topic areas relating to recruiting, involving, listening to and retaining their volunteers
- ✓ Develop better links to local businesses and to other organisations who broker links to businesses in order to bring skills and funding to the voluntary sector.

### **Impact:**

- ✓ Potential volunteers know of the Volunteer Centre and find it easy to gain access to opportunities
- ✓ For the community to have a positive perception of volunteering and understanding of its impact, resulting in more people undertaking volunteering
- ✓ Voluntary sector organisations are aware of good practice in the recruitment and retention of volunteers
- ✓ The private sector is aware of the benefits to them of working with the voluntary sector.

### **Objective 3. Individuals and communities are more connected, supported and independent and have enhanced wellbeing**

Encourage, facilitate and develop opportunities available to enable individuals to be as independent as possible. Independent people have the best chance of being healthy, happy and safe.

#### **We will work towards ensuring that:**

- ✓ Local voluntary sector organisations are enabled to reflect the full range of their services users' experiences in order to influence the strategic and operational management of the borough towards equity and inclusiveness
- ✓ We focus on being a proactive service which is delivered by staff and volunteers out in the community
- ✓ We encourage the building of social capital by supporting and creating opportunities for active citizens to make a positive difference
- ✓ We build strong evidence of performance and impact.

#### **For example, we will:**

- ✓ Make an influential contribution to tackling a range of emerging issues, including: health & wellbeing, worklessness and improving learning by providing a diverse range of opportunities for citizens to make a contribution
- ✓ Focus on being a proactive service which is delivered by staff and volunteers out in the community
- ✓ Create a team of trained Volunteer Champions supporting our service delivery, including back-office services, Social Prescribing, Handyperson and Digital Champions.

#### **Impact:**

- ✓ Communities are better connected and supported
- ✓ Individuals undertaking activities within the community have been supported to gain the skills, knowledge and ability to enable them to deliver the vision of their organisation/group
- ✓ People who report that their wellbeing has improved.

## **Objective 4. Our own organisation is developed and strengthened, in order to deliver maximum results**

To be a strong organisation, balancing our social purpose and our sustainable focus. As a financially viable organisation we want an excellent reputation for delivering high quality services for local people, member organisations and communities.

### **We will work towards ensuring that Communities 1st is:**

- ✓ Accountable and responsive to a proactive and diverse membership
- ✓ Recognised as an exemplar support resource for the voluntary sector and its partners, as a champion for voluntary action and as an outstanding repository of voluntary sector information, intelligence and history
- ✓ Innovative in its responses to new needs and challenges, enterprising in its income generation activities, and committed to continuously improving its ways of working
- ✓ Actively promoting the work and achievements of the wider voluntary sector and its own work and achievements.

### **For example, we will:**

- ✓ Secure Communities 1st as a viable, well-managed community business with a competent team supported by effective governance
- ✓ Further develop our member benefits package, and implement an extensive membership drive in order to extend the size, reach and diversity of our membership
- ✓ Make sure our cost base is flexible in order to respond to changes in demand and funding.

### **Impact:**

- ✓ Communities 1st is recognised as an excellent provider of information, advice, training, volunteer brokerage and networking for the sector
- ✓ A wider, diverse range of organisations are using our services
- ✓ We optimise our income and broaden our funding base
- ✓ Become locally recognised for good practice in involving volunteers in the delivery of services.

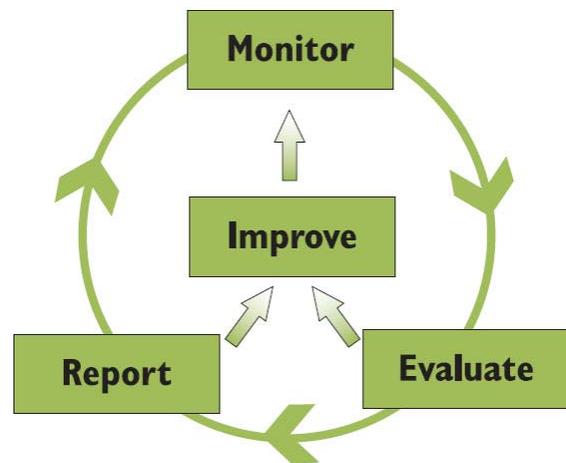
## How we will know it's effective

The management team at Communities 1st regularly monitor the performance of the services delivered, reviewing the outputs of the services against set targets. The performance is also monitored by the trustee board at the board meetings.

Customer feedback is important to us and we use this to review the service and make adjustments. Each team has an improvement log where comments, complements and complaints are logged and actioned. We use this process to support continuous improvement within the service ensuring that it is meeting the needs of our customers.

Over the next three years Communities 1st will be developing a performance management and outcomes monitoring process to evidence the impact of our services and identify the success of activity.

We will have in place an established monitoring system and will be using this to track the impact that we have on communities and on the individuals that work or volunteer to make a difference locally.



## Our Thanks

We exist because the voluntary sector exists. Our purpose is to serve that sector, and the people that it, in turn, seeks to serve. We set forth on the next stage of our efforts with confidence, humility, and a deep sense of gratitude for your continued support and partnership.

### Communities 1st operate out of the following locations:

- Civic Centre, St Peters Street, St Albans, AL1 3JE
- 2 Allum Lane, Elstree, Hertfordshire, WD6 3PJ
- Community Shop, Leeming Road, Borehamwood, WD6 4EB
- Aberford Park Community Centre, Aberford Road, Borehamwood, WD6 1PN
- Farriers Way Community Centre, Farriers Way, Borehamwood, WD6 2TB
- Windsor Hall, Blythe Close, Borehamwood, WD6 4EE
- Radlett Centre, Aldenham Ave, Radlett, WD7 8HL
- 8 Rudolph Road, Bushey, WD23 3DU
- Caledon Community Centre, London Colney AL2 1PS
- Wyllyotts Centre, Darkes Lane, Potters Bar EN6 2AA

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