



National Lottery Community Fund

End of Year Report 2025

*Supporting Communities Across
Wiltshire. Stronger Together.*



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Executive Summary

This report details the progress and achievements of the Stronger Together programme in its first year, developed by Wessex Community Action (WCA) to support the diverse Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector in Wiltshire. The programme's core focus areas include capacity building, volunteering, training, funding support, partnerships, and leadership.

Key Achievements in 2025:

- **Leadership and Advocacy:** WCA continued its vital advocacy role, meeting monthly with the BSW Integrated Care Board and co-chairing the 54-member Wiltshire VCSE Leadership Alliance. A pilot Hypertension Case Finding programme was successfully led in community settings, highlighted by a case study demonstrating early detection intervention at Salisbury Livestock Market.
- **Strategic Development:** A leading role was played in developing the Wiltshire Council & VCS Strategic Framework, ensuring wide VCSE participation and a focus on collaborative priorities.
- **Sector Insight:** The 2025 State of the Sector Survey was completed with 40 organisations, highlighting key challenges: rising costs, increased demand (67.5% reported an increase), and difficulty recruiting volunteers and trustees.
- **Partnerships and Networks: Key networks were maintained and developed:**
 - The Children and Families Voluntary Sector Forum (CFVSF) secured an additional three-year agreement with Wiltshire Council (£45,000).
 - The Volunteer Managers Forum membership grew to 93.
 - An inaugural Mental Health Providers Network was launched in partnership with Alabare.
- **Digital Platform Growth:** The Wiltshire Together online platform saw significant growth, with the total number of users increasing from 25,396 to 71,724 and page views reaching 163,849. The social value created by the platform in 2025 was calculated at £1,848,337.

- **Direct Support and Consultancy:** WCA provided Information, Advice, and Guidance (IAG) to 64 individuals and 21 groups. Consultancy support for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund Rural Hubs grant fund supported six organisations in securing £257,000 in total funds.
- **Community Programmes:** The design for the Community Connectors programme was finalised after learning from Health Connections Mendip, and a pilot roll-out is planned to follow on-the-ground asset mapping in Bemerton Heath.

Challenges and Future Focus:

A key challenge was balancing the increased appetite for in-person networking with the limited capacity of VCSE organisations, leading to the adoption of a flexible hybrid approach for events. In 2026, the programme will focus on developing the Volunteer Managers Forum with online sessions, building on engagement with the Wiltshire Together platform, and launching the Community Connector pilot programme.

Introduction & Background

The stronger together programme was developed as a response to the needs of our VCSE sector in Wiltshire. Incredibly diverse and distributed over a wide geographic area many common challenges exist around increasing demand, accessing funding and the recruitment of volunteers and trustees. Alongside these challenges, however, are opportunities to work together and to share knowledge, expertise and resources. These opportunities extend beyond the voluntary sector with local authorities and in recent years Integrated Care Boards.

At Wessex Community Action our work has focused on building networks, peer groups, collaborations, and partnerships, taking an asset-based approach. Our learning in these areas was then encoded in the DNA of Stronger Together which focused on the following activities:

- Capacity building
- Volunteering
- Training and consultancy
- Funding support
- Community Connectors
- Volunteer Champions
- Partnerships & collaborations
- Asset mapping
- Leadership & Advocacy
- State of the Sector Annual Review

We said that by 2027, Stronger Together will deliver outcomes including improved connectivity between people, places, groups, and sectors to foster healthier, more resilient communities. It will also support more community organisations to access high-quality advice, support, and facilitation, increasing their capacity. In addition, it will improve volunteering and community action to support thriving children and young people, environmental sustainability, and wellbeing. We are therefore proud to present this end of year report which we feel demonstrates our achievements in these areas whilst also taking the opportunity to reflect on the learnings we have gained from the first year of the project.

Leadership & Advocacy

VCSE leadership alliance

We have continued to meet monthly with the Bath, North East Somerset, Swindon and Wiltshire Integrated Care Board as the representatives of the VCSE sector. Recent focus has been ensuring the inclusion of voluntary sector representation in the development of neighbourhood health plans and integrated neighbourhood teams as well as facilitating VCSE representation on key delivery groups.

In November we attended an NHS England event 'Together for neighbourhood health: mobilising VCSE leadership through community partnerships' where we joined CVS colleagues including SPARK Somerset and Voluntary Action Swindon. This was a VCSE focussed improvement event to bring together senior leads across all sectors to focus on neighbourhood health through exploring various scenarios with the primary goal to enhance VCSE strategic partnership working across the South-West. Along with our sector colleagues we promoted a strong message of the value of involving the VCSE sector in neighbourhood health and of the need for bravery and openness to enable this.

Hypertension Case Finding

We have led on a pilot programme of blood pressure testing in community settings aimed to improve the early detection of hypertension. Working alongside the Integrated Carte Board and Community First, WCA has acted as project lead. Over 2025 we have made arrangements for blood pressure testing to be carried out at Salisbury Livestock Market, the Salisbury Men Matters event, the Bemerton Heath Centre and the Friary Centre.

Case study: Salisbury Livestock Market Hypertension Testing

We had the BP team into the market two weeks ago and one gentleman had a red scale blood-pressure reading and was advised to see his doctor asap but the earliest appointment he could get was six weeks away. He went to the pharmacy instead and they checked it again. It was still very high, so they arranged a same-day doctor's appointment for him.

In just two weeks of cutting out biscuits and crisps, swapping Frosties for porridge and giving himself an extra 30 minutes at lunchtime his blood pressure has already come

down. He said he's going to keep an eye on what he eats and adjust his workload whenever he can and get help.

He was incredibly grateful. He had no idea his BP was at such a dangerous level, and he said the fear of a stroke or heart attack is what pushed him to investigate further. Had the BP team not been at the market, he would not have had it checked.

Health Inequalities Grants

Wessex Community Action was a panel member for the 2025 Health Inequalities Grants. This involved supporting the co-production of the funding criteria and priorities which took place at workshops as well as inputting into panel decisions on funding awards. This involvement meant we were able to bring VCSE perspective to panel discussions. In addition, we promoted the grants through our newsletter and the Wiltshire VCSE Leadership Alliance and facilitated webinar events for prospective applicants to ensure a wide range of VCSE organisations were enabled to develop projects and make funding applications.

Wiltshire VCSE Leadership Alliance

We continue to co-chair the Wiltshire VCSE Leadership Alliance with Community First. This 'place-based' alliance, which has equivalents in Bath and North East Somerset and Swindon, brings together senior leaders from voluntary and community sector organisations with the BSW Integrated Care Board and Wiltshire Council and currently stands at 54 members. The alliance provides a vital space for collaboration at both a strategic and practical level and enjoys a high-level of support from key stakeholders. In 2025 speakers included the Wiltshire Council Director of Commissioning, Deputy Leader of the Council and Head of Combined Place at the Integrated Care Board.

Agenda items in 2025 have included:

- Wiltshire Council Commissioning
- Mental health and wellbeing partnership
- Impact of employer's national insurance contributions on the VCSE
- Health inequalities funding
- HCRG Care Group community health model
- Wiltshire Council/ VCSE strategic framework
- Neighbourhood health plans

Wiltshire Council & VCS Strategic framework

Throughout 2025 we have played a leading role in the development of the Wiltshire Council & VCS Strategic framework as a steering group member. In September we attended a drafting session and delivered a presentation to the group on the findings of the 2025 state of the sector survey where we focused attention on the value and achievements of the sector. We also highlighted the key challenges facing the sector of increasing demand, financial sustainability in an increasingly difficult funding environment and the challenge of volunteer and trustee recruitment.

In the session we explored areas where the voluntary sector and Wiltshire council could collaborate on a strategic level around areas such as volunteering and commissioning, with an emphasis on developing spaces where the voluntary sector and Wiltshire Council can collaborate as equal partners.

Working with Community First, we also ran an engagement exercise on the framework for smaller grass roots community groups. This was carried out as the result of feedback we had provided about the initial absence of these groups from the process of developing the framework.

We continue to be involved in the development of the framework which is currently approaching its final draft. We feel that when published the framework will have a tangible set of actions which will benefit the voluntary and community sector in Wiltshire. Our influence in the process has enabled a wide range of VCSE organisations to participate in producing the strategy and will mean that the finished document goes further in addressing the needs of the sector and will build on good practice.

State of the Sector

Fieldwork for the 2025 State of the Sector survey was undertaken between May and June 2025 with 40 organisations in total participating by completing an online questionnaire. The questionnaire explored organisations size, strengths and challenges. The results highlighted several key issues impacting on the sector including:

- **Rising costs** – Increase in running costs identified as a ‘significant challenge’ by 27.5% and a ‘moderate challenge’ by 30%
- **Increase in demand** – 67.5% reported experiencing an increase in demand over the past 12 months. For 27.5% demand had increased a lot.
- **Funding** – Core funding identified as a ‘significant challenge’ by 37.5% and ‘moderate challenge’ by 22.5%. Project funding identified as a ‘moderate challenge’ by 35%

- **Difficulty recruiting volunteers and trustees** – 57.5% reported experiencing difficulty recruiting volunteers and 45% difficulty recruiting trustees over the past year.

In August we ran a webinar to present survey results and made a presentation to the Wiltshire and Swindon Funders Network where we emphasised some of the challenges identified by organisations around funding. A presentation on the findings was also made to the steering group leading the development of the Wiltshire Council/VCSE Strategic Framework which informed key discussions on the challenges facing the sector.

Partnerships & Collaboration

Children and Families Voluntary Sector Forum (CFVSF)

We supported the CFVSF with three meetings in January, March and in September we facilitated an in-person meeting at Devizes Town Hall. This was attended by the Wiltshire Council cabinet member for Children's Services and 33 delegates from a cross-section of VCSE organisations. The session also included a training session for members on parental substance misuse.

The three-year agreement to support the Forum with Wiltshire Council expired in April 2025 leading to a brief hiatus of the forum however, following the submission of a proposal, agreement has been reached with Wiltshire Council for WCA to continue to support the CFVSF for an additional three years from September 2025 at a total value of £45,000. This is an exciting development which enables the forum to develop further. WCA will also support the forum executive in the recruitment of a forum chair to replace the chair who stood down in early 2024.

Agenda items in 2025 included:

- Family hub navigators
- Speed chatting networking session
- Wiltshire Children and Young People's Health and Wellbeing Survey
- Autism awareness

Volunteer Managers Forum

The Volunteer Managers forum is a space for anyone supporting volunteers to come together, share ideas, discuss challenges and learn from each other. It is hosted by WCA and is led by steering group involving Volunteer Managers from Dorothy House, Wiltshire Council, Healthwatch Wiltshire.

There are currently 93 members of the forum, and we met 4 times in March, June, September and December with on average 10-15 attending each in person session.

The sessions focussed on Volunteer recruitment, learning about Wiltshire Together and celebrating volunteers, Employer Supported Volunteering and navigating difficult conversations.

We also had discussions around what people valued from the forum and what we could do differently. As a result, in 2026 we plan to include some online sessions to

compliment the in person meetings and have started a bring and share lunch to make this part of the session more interactive.

“The organisation of meeting was fabulous, informal and the feeling of free speech with no judgements” - Volunteer Manager

“always informative - always engaging and I will always try to be there as a priority because it is always helpful” - Volunteer Manager

Wiltshire Inclusion Network

Wiltshire Inclusion Network (WIN) is a community of practice where groups of active practitioners come together to share ideas, experiences and best practice and support each other to pool and acquire knowledge. Four meetings were held in 2025 at quarterly intervals: January, April, July and October. Membership currently stands at 49.

The approach in the past year has been to seek out engaging guest speakers who can discuss work they have been involved in or are planning in Wiltshire. This provides an opportunity to learn from what has worked well and enables the group to collectively support projects with ideas and suggestions.

Agenda items in 2025 have included:

- Supporting asylum seekers in Wiltshire
- Patient and Carer Race Equality Framework
- Health inequalities and engagement with Gypsy, Romas, travellers and Boaters
- Educafe – Wiltshire Project
- Silver Salisbury – outreach and engagement work

Mental Health Providers Network

In September attendees came together for the inaugural meeting of the Wiltshire Mental Health Providers Network. This network was created in partnership with Alabare, a charity who had recently been commissioned to provide mental health services in Wiltshire and who recognised a need to bring together the multitude of smaller providers in the county.

The nineteen attendees identified six main themes as areas of focus

- Access to information – Particularly a directory of services
- Training and capacity building – identifying where opportunities can be shared
- Collaboration and networking – working across all sectors
- User voice & inclusion – including service user voice in the network

- System navigation – a single front door approach and better referral pathways in crisis
- Funding and sustainability – partnership bids

Fundraisers Coffee Morning

Working with Wiltshire Treehouse, we launched a networking meeting for fundraisers. This was based on the recognition that fundraising can often be a challenging and lonely role. During 2025 we held three sessions. The first session in March was attended by 10 fundraisers. Further sessions were in June in Trowbridge followed by a hybrid in-person/online meeting at our Salisbury offices in October. Agenda items included talks from funders such as Wiltshire and Swindon Community Foundation and the Cooperative Groups as well as discussions on fundraising techniques and challenges. Feedback from attendees was positive, particularly around the opportunity to learn from others and the group will be developed in 2026 with a focus on developing fundraisers skills.

“Thank you very much for organising the very useful event and good notes. Please also pass my thanks to Sarah [Sarah Bear – Wiltshire Treehouse] who I thought was very knowledgeable and helpful.” – Attendee March 2025 meeting

Wiltshire Together

In 2025 the Wiltshire Together platform achieved a good level of growth in terms of the total number of users, page-views and community listings.

Wiltshire Together	Baseline	2025
Total number of users	25,396	71,724
Page views	111,778	163,849
New events listed	365	325
New community listings	254	709
Volunteering opportunities advertised	188	285

User feedback received through surveys of platform users has demonstrated that the platform has had positive outcomes:

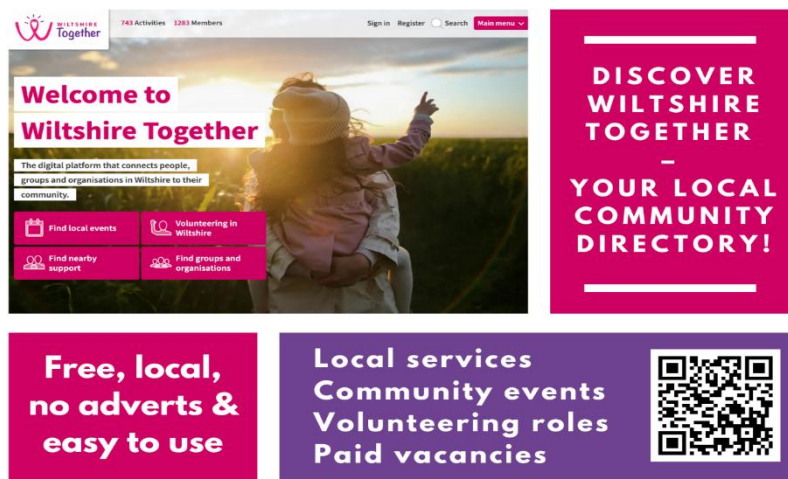
“As a result of engaging with you, we received four approaches from possible volunteers.”

In 2026 we will seek to build on this by carrying out additional engagement with a greater number of platform users. Platform developer Made Open have trialled a Social Value calculation methodology based on the social value TOM system. Using this they have provided calculation for the social value created by Wiltshire Together in 2025 is £1,848,337.

See data tables in Appendix for further breakdown.

Community Connectors

Having identified a similar Community Connector scheme being delivered in Frome, Somerset we held a number of meetings with Health Connections Mendip (HCM) to gain further information on their operating model. Critically, HCM explained that the core element of their connector programme was simply to signpost to a central directory through an information postcard. HCM also shared materials from the connector training sessions. This has enabled us to finalise the design of our programme and to move forward with recruiting community connectors.



(Materials provided by Health Connections Frome)



Asset mapping

Asset mapping has been completed on community hubs. This was undertaken as a desktop exercise and will form the basis of the community hubs networking meeting scheduled for 2026. Additionally, asset mapping around inclusion, initially carried out as part of Wiltshire inclusion Network, was updated and refreshed.

In October we undertook three days of on-the-ground asset mapping in the Bemerton Heath neighbourhood of Salisbury, in partnership with Salisbury City Council. This activity increased our knowledge and connection to grass-roots community groups and identified key community leaders. This will now form the basis for a pilot roll-out of the community connector programme.

Supporting Salisbury City Council

In October we delivered a session to the Communities Team at Salisbury City Council. We covered:

- The role of Wessex Community Action
- The basics around group support including governance, funding, legal structures
- Volunteering recruitment and support

The session was well received and there were several actions taken by the team around development of volunteering policies, strategy and processes and ensuring consistency with volunteering across the council departments.

“On behalf of SCC’s communities team thank you so much for our team development session today- plenty of interaction and engagement and a nice balance of different learning methods to suit different learning styles. We all found it useful, not only as a refresher for how we work to develop and support our volunteers and community groups, but also, to have the time to collaborate, share ideas and learn new tips and techniques around managing difficult situations and conflict. Lots of positive actions to take forward to improve our practice. Thank you!” - Head of Communities, Salisbury District Council

We also then supported and presented at their Community Strategy Engagement Day. This was attended by a range of VCS organisations from across Salisbury. We shared information about the local landscape, challenges being faced and the support that we can offer at WCA.

“I wanted to say a massive thank you to you both for your support as speaker and facilitators for our Community Strategy event this week.

Neil, I thought your presentation was spot on, and it was very useful for many in the room to understand more about WCA and what you do, but also the risks and

opportunities across the sector....Attendees have come back to me saying they didn't know what you did and that they intend to make contact!" - Head of Communities, Salisbury District Council

Consultancy and evaluations

In June 2025 we completed an evaluation of Wilton Sunrise Project – Pre Development Stage having been approached by the trustees.

In July 2025 we entered into an agreement with Wiltshire Council to provide consultancy support for applicants to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund Rural Hubs grant fund. This involved working with applicants to enable them to ensure they had all necessary elements in place to successfully deliver projects whilst providing a final report on each to Wiltshire Council. Over the course of this engagement, we supported six organisations who received £257,000 total grant funds.

Community Development

During 2025, we gave Information, Advice and Guidance to 64 individuals and 21 groups and Organisational development to 20 groups. This was delivered through email, telephone, online and in person meetings and the support provided was tailored to suit that individual's/group's needs.

We carried 24 health checks with organisations to identify their strengths and where they may need more support so that our offer could be tailored to meet their needs.

Case Study: Helping Trowbridge Amateur Boxing Club Take the Next Step

Trowbridge Amateur Boxing Club has been part of the local community for over 20 years, offering young people and adults a positive, structured sports environment.

The club got in touch with Wessex Community Action for advice on how to become “fit for funding” and that began their journey of growth and development.

Trowbridge Amateur Boxing Club were facing a few challenges including a run down and no formal agreement on their premises and no formal legal structure. They had big ambitions including becoming a community hub and launching new sessions for under-10s and people living with Parkinson's, but weren't sure where to start.

How We Helped

We provided ongoing, tailored support to help Trowbridge Amateur Boxing Club build confidence, explore new opportunities, and move closer to their goals. This included:

- One-to-One Advice & Health Check
- Advice on Legal Structure
- Funding Support
- Connections & Mentoring
- Training & Resources
- Ongoing Follow-Up

Progress So Far

Trowbridge Amateur Boxing Club have made significant progress:

- Relocated to a new venue in central Trowbridge.
- Raised over £7,000 in new funding to improve the space and purchase equipment.
- Successfully registered as a charity, unlocking wider funding opportunities.
- Staff have completed specialist coaching courses, including Parkinson's coaching via England Boxing.
- Plans are underway to launch new sessions for 7–10-year-olds and offer more inclusive activities for vulnerable groups.

Training and Events

In 2025 we organised 11 training sessions and events which were attended by 54 attendees. The included Online Meet the Funder sessions, AI for beginners, Information sessions on different aspects of Wiltshire Together, First aid and Governance support. Bitesize training in its original format didn't seem fit for purpose and wasn't something that was not in demand, so we have adapted our offer to meet the needs of those reaching out to us.

“Excellent training and very relevant to my area of work.”

“Thank you for offering this free training. It was most interesting and informative.”

We collect feedback from the attendees of our events and have asked them what they would like to see in terms of events going forward and we are incorporating their suggestions into our plans for 2026.

News and Information Sharing

Regular newsletters are sent out sharing updates from WCA, info about training and events, news on any funding opportunities, Information on Wiltshire together and promotion of the platform, and sharing community news. This is one of our main sources of sharing information with the wider voluntary sector.

There are 915 on our mailing list that receive our newsletter and 37 newsletters sent out in 2025.

Volunteering

Wiltshire Together is our online volunteer brokerage platform, where local people can create a profile and register their interest as a volunteer, and organisations can list their volunteer opportunities. Individuals can then search for suitable roles, and vice versa, organisations can search the volunteer profiles to potential volunteers.

There were 171 live volunteering opportunities listed at end of 2025 and 140 people registered as volunteers and looking for volunteering roles on the platform.

During 2025, 285 vol opportunities were shared in total and 178 people pledged to volunteer to roles advertised on the platform.

Volunteer champions

A Volunteer Champions training session was delivered to volunteer managers at the Volunteer Managers Forum in June and at an online session in October. This session shared all the information needed to promote volunteering roles on the Wiltshire Together platform and give people the confidence to use the platform effectively for their own charities. It also encouraged attendees to promote Wiltshire Together as the platform that a volunteer could use to search for potential opportunities if they were the right fit for them. These sessions were well attended and those in attendance are now able to carry out their Volunteer Champion role.

Challenges & Opportunities

Throughout the delivery in 2025 we have experienced a number of key challenges and opportunities.

As we continue to move forward from the pandemic, we have seen an increased appetite for organisations to meet in-person. We have witnessed at our forums and events the richness which comes with in-person events and the many formal and informal networking opportunities these present for the voluntary sector. A key challenge is balancing this with organisations often limited capacity for time, including travel time to events in what is a large rural county. We have adopted a flexible hybrid approach based on feedback from our stakeholders which has allowed us to offer a varied programme of both online and in-person events. For the latter we have learnt that having a good quality agenda and clear communications are beneficial as this enables partners to make clear decisions on when to invest time in travelling to an event.

As a small team covering a large geographic area with a diverse voluntary and community sector partnership working has been crucial in our delivery. This has enabled us to both increase capacity and deepen our relationships within and across the sector. This has been underpinned by regular meetings with key partners such as Voluntary Action Swindon, Community First, 3SG, Wiltshire & Swindon Community Foundation and the Communities' team at Wiltshire Council. In terms of delivery, we have partnered with Wiltshire Treehouse on the Fundraiser's coffee morning and Alabare on the Mental Health Providers Network. We have partnered with Community First on the community Hypertension project with WCA acting as the lead organisation and Community First providing links to village halls and administrative support.

We have learnt that good partnership working is based on solid relationships, trust, mutual respect and a culture of reciprocity. We have sought to embed these values in our work and interactions.

Appendix

Data tables

	Target (over 3 years)	2025
IAG Individuals	220	64
IAG Organisations	280	21
Com Dev Support	260	20
Health Checks	72	24
Org Dev - Action plans	45	2
Training sessions		11
Training participants	720	54
Consultancy	12	4

Partnerships and Networks	Member Orgs	2025
Wilts VCSE leadership alliance	58	54
WIN	57	49
CFVSF	155	151
Vol Managers Forum	53	93
CEO Breakfast	40	0
BSW Leadership Alliance	6	6

	Target (over 3 years)	2025
Neighbourhood Connectors	12	0
Community Lunches	9	0
Volunteer Connectors	18	15

Asset mapping		2025
Salisbury		1
Trowbridge		0
Melksham		0
Chippenham		0
Thematic		2

Wiltshire Together	Baseline	2025
Total number of users	25396	71,724
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Made Open Social Value Breakdown:

Member interactions <i>This counts up the value of new members joining, existing members signing in, members sending messages and members completing searches.</i>	£623,617.00
Activity behaviour <i>This counts up all new activities added and any associated activity like pledging, adding ideas or voting. It also includes views of guides or check ins on goals and any activity within teamspace.</i>	£46,425.77
User behaviour <i>This counts the value of a 'user' in relation to google analytics and any submissions to the platform's feedback forms.</i>	£1,178,294.90
Total	£1,848,337.67

Additional details on the methodology used can be found at:

<https://vimeo.com/1064675453?share=copy#t=0>