**Hastings Voluntary Action**

**Annual Report**

**for the year ended 31 March 2022**

* During the year 2021/22, the country emerged from the lockdowns of the COVID 19 pandemic. Hastings Voluntary Action provided support to charities, community groups and community centres in Hastings to restart and re-open their services. HVA also gradually re-opened the buildings it manages, and returned to face-to-face meetings, training and events.
* HVA continued to organise and chair the COVID 19 Community Hub to bring together partners from all sectors, to share information, co-ordinate activities, and deliver a range of service to vulnerable residents affected by COVID 19 and the subsequent lockdowns.
* During the year funding was obtained from East Sussex Public Health to develop via a local Food Network a wider approach to food access and sustainability and a designated officer is in place to coordinate this.
* HVA supported NHS colleagues with the roll out of the vaccine programme, such as providing local intelligence about hotspots and potential vaccination sites, and recruiting volunteers to support the programme. A learning and evaluation event was held to look at the programme and model how access to the most vulnerable communities could be improved in the roll-out of future health programmes.
* HVA participated in research conducted by East Sussex County Council to look at measures and methodologies to reduce social isolation and the vulnerabilities associated with this.
* HVA was a Census Champion in 2021, and raised awareness of the importance for our town to have an accurate count of people living here. HVA staff were trained to help people in Hastings & Rother who couldn’t fill in the online Census form, and we particularly tried to reach Refugees, Asylum Seekers and people who were homeless.
* HVA supported organisation to recruit volunteers as they re-started or continued their activities. In November 2021 HVA recruited a new member of staff who is dedicated to increasing volunteering in the town, and HVA helped over 75 people into volunteering activities during the last few months of this year.
* Based on the experience of COVID 19 HVA captured the issues and trends via the Community Hub which led to a successful application to the Government’s Community Renewal Fund resulting in over £100,000 funding to commission research into trends

in local volunteering, promote cross sector working and develop learning opportunities so that services meet the needs and referrals work effectively.

* HVA increased the volume of information that we published, to publicise sources of support and to help people in the Borough to keep up to date with changes to local services and latest guidance. We published fortnightly ebulletins to 1950+ readers, daily posts to 1600+ facebook followers, increased the information on HVA’s website, and started to experiment with short videos as a way to communicate with our beneficiaries.
* HVA undertook significant one-to-one casework to support organisations facing change to their operating environment. We responded to a broad range of themes including human resources, setting up new organisations, winding down organisations, mergers & collaboration, health & safety risk management, organisational development, financial management, funding advice, marketing and promotion and data management. In the three months of January to March 2022, HVA provided direct specific individual support to 148 different charities and community groups.
* A funding advice service provided advice and support to local groups and supported inward investment to Hastings –the most deprived area in the South East of England –levering in over £1,571,000, and creating or sustaining 20 jobs.
* HVA contributed to building the skills and knowledge of local VCS groups by running 12 training sessions, courses and seminars.
* Through its support of Hastings Community Network, HVA enabled the sector to represent itself on key cross sector structures such as the Local Strategic Partnership and other key strategic bodies. HVA regularly consulted and engaged with its member organisations on a range of key issues to ensure that Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) groups could be advised of major policy changes. Quarterly networking events were held to bring together a range of organisations with a view to improving local service delivery and referrals between them. These took the form of themed events covering topics chosen by local organisations or the popular “open mic” sessions which gave groups an opportunity to promote services or projects, debate current issues and reflect of what was bring learned. We worked collaboratively with the Leader of the Local Authority to present and involve local organisations in the Budget and Strategic plan process.
* HVA also supported the development of a strategic alignment between East Sussex County Council and the leaders of Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise Sector. Known as Partnership Plus this work has supported work streams to improve workforce development, commissioning, and cross sector knowledge and understanding. This work has resulted in the publication of research conducted by the Institute of Voluntary Action Research examining the economic contribution of the

VCSE in East Sussex. HVA was an active member of the East Sussex VCSE alliance engaging with VCSE leaders on a County wide basis.

* HVA worked with NHS partners to plan to meet the challenges of community and voluntary sector involvement at a strategic level. During the reporting period HVA's was a member of the East Sussex Strategic Partnership bringing together senior leaders from the business community, public sector and voluntary sector. We also offered advice to strategic partners about the involvement of the VCSE sector and the structures in place to facilitate this.
* HVA delivered a variety of projects and campaigns linked to a diverse range of areas including Refugees and Asylum Seekers, Age Friendly Communities, Mental Wellbeing and Physical Health. The Charity also acted as the Locally Trusted Organisation supporting a programme of community involvement and decision making in North East Hastings, one of the most deprived parts of the Borough.
* HVA supported the continuing development of the Education Futures Trust by acting as a Trustee and has helped support its service for children, schools and families.
* During the year HVA worked as part of the Town Deal Board and investment panel to deliver the Town Deal programme for Hastings involving a projected investment to the Borough of £26.2 million.
* HVA continued to provide affordable high-quality accommodation to other not-for-profit organisations including those working with carers, children, people with learning disabilities, and people with mental health issues. HVA also managed a meeting space in Hastings town centre. During the year HVA also concluded negotiations with another Charity to agree in principle the transfer of an asset in Central St Leonards with a view to extending the availability of affordable accommodation for the VCSE sector together with access to meeting and training space.