

Applicant Name	Hastings Voluntary Action
Assessor Name	Nina Porter
Date of Report	8 February 2024

Four Functions Grading and Rationale

Function One – Leadership and Advocacy

1.1 Strategy

Both the Chair of Trustees and the CEO of HVA have a clear and consistent understanding of the purpose of HVA and the dual role it plays in supporting the voluntary sector (both as an advocate and through direct support). A range of research has been undertaken and there is ongoing consultation to maintain a good understanding of the needs of the community and the sector. There are internal processes within HVA (the complex case review system) which enable the staff team to better understand and reflect on issues facing organisations and collaborate on developing support.

There is a 5 year Strategic Plan in place. Whilst this sets a clear framework, it is high-level and generic and is not currently supported by an annual business plan/delivery programme.

1.2 Leadership and Representation

This is an area of strength for HVA. Case study 1 (Golden Thread) shows how HVA is viewed as trusted organisation that is capable of bringing other voluntary sector organisations together and playing a leadership role. This was a view endorsed by Tracey Rose, FSN who gave the example of HVA’s work on engaging with the Borough Council during their annual budget review process - facilitating a meeting between HBC/voluntary sector and then collating the views of the sector in a written submission. East Sussex County Council also praised the leadership and representation role of HVA, citing them as a “window into the sector”.

Hastings Community Network is an excellent example of how HVA is facilitating ongoing consultation and discussion using a cross-sector forum. It was cited by many of the interviewees as a valuable resource for communication, knowledge sharing and campaigning. There was also evidence provided of how representative roles on other fora were shared across the sector in an organised manner.

1.3 Advocacy

HVA has a strong track record in publishing documents to outline the trends and issues facing the VCSE. Eg. Facing the Future report, Vision for Volunteering. The Facing the Future report in particular was referenced by some of the interviewees as being a valuable document. ESCC said it was an anchor document that he had used to raise awareness of issues across the Council. Tracey Rose, FSN said it had “enabled the whole picture to be pulled together”. Her organisation deals mainly with children and young people so the report had improved her understanding of issues facing other groups such as older people and homeless people.

“Making it Happen” is an asset-based community development project where HVA are the delivery partner in Hastings. In this role they are gathering the views of residents and helping to facilitate local activities and/or advocate for improvement in local services. Community engagement and development are areas of strength for HVA and they feed into support for voluntary sector organisations. The level of community development is relatively high for an Infrastructure organisation.

1.4 Accessible and Welcoming Services

The voluntary and community sector within Hastings is well developed and HVA is embedded at the heart of the sector. Evidence of their accessibility includes the range of ways in which people can get in touch: face to face (drop in to the physical centre or through attending a meeting/event); via phone or online. Details of venues used for meetings show the accessibility information for each venue. There is a good website and HVA is active on social media - with a welcoming voice.

The Links project (delivered by HVA) provides support for refugees and asylum seekers. One of the key areas it addresses is the lack of English as a first language. This is addressed by recruiting volunteers who can speak different languages, helping with cultural knowledge as well as direct communication.

There is also a mens health project Mr Hastings and St Leonards, which has sought to identify effective ways of communicating with and including men in discussions around their health.

Areas of Strength and Areas for Development

The leadership and representation role of HVA is very strong. They are well respected and trusted by voluntary and statutory organisations and they have both formal (HCN) and informal mechanisms in place to deliver this role. However, as identified by HVA and others, much of this work is undertaken by Steve. An area for development is to support additional HVA staff members to grow their leadership roles.

The level of research and consultation with the voluntary sector is strong and has been used to “inform” delivery plans. Greater clarity on how delivery is monitored and capturing the impact of these plans could help to ensure that HVA is operating effectively and achieving its aims.

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Function Two – Partnerships and Collaborations

2.1 Stakeholder Relationships

All the external partners spoke very highly of HVA (ESCC - funder; FDA - organisation supported by HVA; SCDA - delivery partner). They were consistent in their views of HVA as knowledgeable, in touch with the sector, a listening organisation and supportive. Paul Rideout ESCC gave the example of joint working on the Tribe platform (developing a volunteering platform that could be used across East Sussex). ESCC decided to start in Hastings because of the vibrant sector there and the work undertaken by HVA on the IVAR Voices in Volunteering report.

SCDA highlighted HVA as the partner in East Sussex that has championed the Making it Happen project.

The Mr Hastings and St Leonards project is a good example of working with community, voluntary and statutory (health) stakeholders to improve services for a client group.

2.2. Voluntary Sector Relationships

Hastings Community Network is a mature partnership structure facilitated by HVA that provides a focus for networking across the voluntary sector. Tracey Rose, FSN described HCN as a valuable partnership. She felt that the views of the voluntary sector in Hastings were listened to more because of the Community Network. She also highlighted that it is cross-sector with representatives from the County Council, Borough Council and health organisations also attending.

HVA also brings together organisations with a common purpose to share good practice and work in partnership. Examples include the Golden Thread project bringing together organisations supporting people with mental health issues which resulted in a successful funding bid and additional IT resources to improve access to services. Also HVA hosts a network for people who run community buildings. Minutes show a useful exchange of info between participants.

2.3 Cross-sector Relationships

HVA is well integrated into wider partnership structures across East Sussex. HVA sits on the East Sussex VCSE Alliance and through that is nominated to sit on other consultative bodies.

From the interview with ESCC it was clear that the VAs across East Sussex work well together “I treat the VAs as a loose partnership”. Collaboration was evident in the shared delivery of services; for example, the VAs take turns to deliver Volunteer Co-ordinator Forums which are open to all organisations across East Sussex.

There is also wider partnership work, such as Making it Happen. Because of their experience, HVA staff have been asked to provide pastoral support to other MiH staff across the county.

Areas of Strength and Areas for Development

Relationships between HVA and all sectors are strong. HVA works hard to develop and maintain good relationships at all levels, ranging from individuals within target communities to regional strategic partners. This is an area where they excel.

Minor areas for development would be to strengthen reporting mechanisms (although good at verbal updates it was suggested that written reporting can be patchy). Also, given the importance of the Hastings Community Network, to undertake a light review of its documented Terms of Reference.

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Function Three – Capacity Building

3.1 Response to Needs

There is a strong emphasis on asset based community development which lays the groundwork for the development of organisations and partnership working. This is a way of enabling the views of residents to feed in directly to shaping local services. Because HVA is involved at this grass-roots level (probably more than many other VAs) it has a very good understanding of the needs of the local community. This is documented in Making it Happen Action Plans and the men’s health project.

There has been a range of external research undertaken to identify local and voluntary sector needs including the Facing the Future and the Vision for Volunteering reports. HVA undertakes an annual member survey which receives around 40+ responses saying which services they most value and which training is most important.

Verbal consultation also takes place on a regular basis via the Hastings Community Network and other forums that HVA engage in.

3.2 VCSE Provision

The Community Centre Network, Volunteer Co-ordinator Forum, the Food Network, Youth Partnership and the Links project were all given as examples of peer support networks facilitated by HVA (interview Peter Thorpe). Groups discuss how well their services are meeting the needs of beneficiaries as well as sharing data, connecting up services (avoiding duplication) and providing examples of good practice.

The Facing the Future report was based on a large piece of research into the needs of the community and voluntary sector. It was described as an anchor document (by ESC) that highlights many of the issues facing the local voluntary sector. The report has been used to help plan HVA services (and more widely e.g. by ESC).

3.3 Access to Support

HVA provides a wide range of support. Training is particularly strong (323 trainees last year) with a range of topics including fundraising, safeguarding, mental health awareness, equality & diversity, professional boundaries and first aid. When asked what she viewed as the main strengths of the organisation, Tracey Rose, FSN said that she valued the reactivity of HVA in responding to training needs. She gave the example that HVA recently put on mental health training and conflict resolution training in response to demand. The Training Needs Analysis form was provided - showing consultation on the type of training to provide. (Peter was currently chasing up current responses)

HVA has identified that more groups are approaching them when in crisis. They are trying to identify needs earlier on e.g. by offering health checks.

Signposting to services takes place through a regular e-bulletin and via the website and social media.

3.4 Sustainability

Support for individual groups to find and access funding is good. The HVA Funding Guide is very good - highlighting local funds and also where to access further information. Feedback forms from the training session on Funding (Sept 2023) is very positive - showing the session was very helpful for small groups. Meet the Funder sessions were included in the annual conference/AGM.

The two case studies are examples of where HVA has played a key role in bringing in funding to the area. (F3 CS1) HVA helped to create Skills and Learning in the Local Community (SLiC) which brought together community education providers. HVA then used its contacts to help SLiC access match funding for a bid to the European-funded programme CHART. Benefits accrued from working together as well as accessing the funding. List of tangible learning outcomes provided.

F3CS2 Isabel Blackman Centre - shows creativity by HVA in using their role as an appointed organisation to dispose of assets from Friends of The Old People to reallocate funds towards the renovation and running costs of the Isabel Blackman Centre and to secure additional funding.

Areas of Strength and Areas for Development

The provision of training, funding advice and the hands-on approach to facilitating projects that bring funding into the area are all strong areas for HVA.

There is a good understanding of the needs of the community and the needs of the voluntary sector. However, there is some scope for a more nuanced understanding of the sector in terms of size of organisation, geographical coverage and areas of specialism. This could enable more proactive targeting of support and more collaboration with other VAs when delivering support for organisations spanning more than one VA area. As the capacity of HVA is under pressure, this could be a way of prioritising services/beneficiaries. (Although the level of support is tailored to the needs of the group, this currently appears to be a reactive process).

There is scope for more signposting to national resources for the voluntary sector, many of which offer free online support e.g. Catalyst and Charity Digital; Association of Chairs, Getting on Board; NCVO, Charity Commission, Media Trust, Ethical Property Foundation, New Philanthropy Capital etc.

Function Grading

Exceeds

Meets

Almost Meets

Does not meet

Function Four – Volunteering Inspiration and Promotion

4.1 Promoting Volunteering

HVA has listings of volunteer opportunities on its website, although this is more a noticeboard rather than a searchable database. Volunteer opportunities are included within HVA's (general) ebuletin every 2 weeks and a sheet is produced showing Volunteer Opportunities of the month. HVA is also working with East Sussex County Council using the Tribe app to promote volunteering opportunities online. Tribe is still in its early days so it is not clear how effective this will be as a volunteer brokerage service.

HVA attends events to promote volunteering opportunities face-to-face. F4 CaseStudy 1 A nice example of corporate volunteering - matching Balfour Beatty with the Crisp packet project where they now volunteer regularly.

Relative to the overall set of services provided by HVA, volunteer brokerage is quite a small part of the organisation. This may reflect the developed nature of the voluntary sector in Hastings (meaning they recruit most volunteers directly) and/or the lack of resources to support volunteer brokerage.

4.2 Reducing Barriers

Although extensive research was carried out in preparing the Vision for Volunteering and creating the Volunteering Strategy this doesn't seem to have fed into/changed how the HVA volunteer service is being delivered.

HVA offer different ways to engage (e.g. online, via phone, in person) and they attend some targeted events eg. College events for young people, Job centre employability events.

HVA organises one Volunteer Co-ordinator Forum a year and works with the other VAs in East Sussex to support Volunteer Co-ordinator Forums that they host. (ie. 4 Forums held per year across East Sussex). At the last forum the issue of access to volunteer training was discussed, demonstrating some awareness of barriers.

It was recognised that engagement with minority groups is still challenging. Some plans for action in this area are listed, but it is not clear whether any action has been taken in this area.

4.3 Policy & Practice

Volunteering Voices - a Future Vision for Hastings (external report commissioned by HVA) - provides a lot of context for how volunteering is changing post-covid. It was used by ESCC to make the case for establishing the Tribe platform (for volunteer brokerage) and helped to secure the funding for this.

Volunteer Manager Forum notes - show involvement in national campaigns: Volunteers Week, Big Help Out. Encouraging other VIOs to join in e.g. by using HVAs stand or providing volunteer opportunities for young people for an event in the College.

Areas of Strength and Areas for Development

It is difficult to assess the quality of volunteer brokerage services provided by HVA. Whilst there were interactions with 147 potential volunteers in 2022/23 there is no data on how many referrals result in placements.

Jane, HVA Volunteer Development Manager is enthusiastic and knowledgeable about local volunteer opportunities and guides people towards suitable roles through individual discussions. However, this is a relatively resource-intensive mechanism which takes time to do well. It feels like the Volunteer Development Manager role is being spread too thinly and more defined priorities could be set for what HVA is trying to achieve with its volunteer function.


Given the advent of centralised online brokerage via the Tribe platform, HVA could take the opportunity to focus their support for volunteering in the areas identified in their Volunteer Strategy e.g. provide more support for VIOs in areas such as diversity and inclusion and developing more flexible opportunities; work to improve services for volunteers with additional support needs. This could also open up more opportunities to secure external funding for their volunteer services.

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Assessor Final Recommendation

<input type="checkbox"/>	I do not recommend the Applicant is Awarded the LIQA		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	I recommend the Applicant is Awarded the LIQA		
<input type="checkbox"/>	I recommend the Applicant is Awarded the LIQA subject to the following additional evidence being supplied or activity being carried out within the next six months: Click or tap here to enter text.		
Signed	<i>N. Porter</i>	Date	09/02/2024.

NAVCA Use Only

Date of Accreditation	02/04/2024	Expires on	April 2027
Signed		Date	02/04/2024
	Maddy Desforjes, CEO, NAVCA		