

# RUSHMOOR VOLUNTARY SERVICES

## REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2025

This has been a year of significant change for the local community in which we work. In May 2024, Rushmoor residents elected a change in leadership for the Council, requiring the formation of a new Cabinet. This was shortly followed in July by a General Election, also resulting in a change of Government. The new Government announced plans in December for further local devolution across the country and for a Local Government Reorganisation. Hampshire have subsequently become one of six areas to be on the fast-track programme to become a new Mayoral Combined Authority. Early indications are of a new unitary authority combining, at least, Rushmoor Borough, Hart and Basingstoke & Deane District Councils from 2027.

Our colleagues in the local NHS - Frimley Integrated Care Board (ICB) - started the year navigating a new structure following a 30% cut in funding. In May 2025, we learned of the proposal to dissolve Frimley ICB entirely and to subsume parts of the System into other ICBs; Rushmoor and Hart will be subsumed into Hants & IoW ICB so more change to come...

Alongside the changes, we have remained stable and provided a constant support to our sector and to our community. We intend also, to remain a strong partner for our new strategic partners.

### Core Services

Change brings opportunities so, following discussions, we began working more closely with our colleagues at Hart Voluntary Action. They supported us generously whilst we were recruiting to our team, and we have shared several events across both of our memberships. We now hold joint Voluntary Sector Forums, and we share training and funding events.

Our shared Volunteer North Hants brokerage service is performing well, with record numbers of placements for both us and across the LIO network – a significant increase this year.

**Volunteering:** The increasing demand for volunteers is evidenced by the number of volunteering opportunities listed on the Volunteer North Hants database and numbers of volunteers signing up for roles:

- We maintained an average of 134 volunteering opportunities on the database,
- We placed 289 volunteers into a wide variety of opportunities,
- This equates to a financial value of £472,780 (*Based upon a calculation by the Institute of Volunteer Research*)

We have arranged successful Volunteer Fairs, promoted volunteering at Job Fairs, celebrated Volunteer and Trustee Weeks, and hosted a wonderful event celebrating Volunteer Recognition in Rushmoor.

**RVS Responders:** In addition to the traditional brokerage approach to volunteering, we have continued to be supported by our fabulous team of RVS Responders. The team have not only supported RVS activities, they are also in great demand from our member organisations and have supported various community events. These 'bitesize' opportunities have ranged from Rushmoor Borough Council town centre event marshals, Rotary events including Donkey Derby and the Christmas floats and Rushmoor Pride; the Poppy Appeal and the Longest Yarn. RVS Responders fulfilled 151 requests for bite-size volunteering.

**Funding Support:** We routinely share information with our members on the many grants, trusts and funds which are available to community groups. This is achieved through our bi-weekly newsletters,

direct e-mailshots to members, sharing funding bulletins, also via our website and one to one support. During 24/25, we supported the sector to secure approximately £1 million in grants!

**Voluntary Sector Forum:** This year the Forum provided opportunities to engage directly with the new Leader of the Council and Directors of Frimley ICB.

The strength of the Forum was exemplified in December when more than 50 representatives of the sector across Hart and Rushmoor contributed to two community engagement programmes: NCVO facilitated a session to consult and engage the members on the Government's proposed Civil Society Covenant whilst colleagues from Frimley ICB led a session focussing on Reconnect, Reset and Rebuild to gather community input on health and wellbeing priorities for the future.

**Legacy Grants:** Four grants were awarded during the year from our legacy fund. Grants were awarded for transport for a day trip to Brighton for ESOL students and tutors; to develop a monthly support group for parents of SEND families, a freezer for a local food bank and a programme of Wildflower Seed Bomb workshops.

**Rushmoor Link community directory:** The Rushmoor Link has become a valuable community asset for information about groups, activities and venues in Rushmoor. The analytics demonstrate an average of 1,129 users per month - [Find local support in Rushmoor - Rushmoor Link](#)

**Governance and sustainability.** The sometimes-unseen work happening in the background includes our support for the trustees of our member organisations and the formation of new groups. On average we gave extensive support to two groups a month, including workshops to identify their mission and purpose.

## Community Projects

**Cohesion Project:** We have continued to provide settlement support to refugees and asylum seekers in Rushmoor. Following the anti-immigration action in the summer, we have augmented this support by working closely with Rushmoor Borough Council and VCSE groups and volunteer Buddies to support members of our migrant communities to engage in local activities.

**The Smile Project:** RVS have worked in collaboration with Frimley ICS to deliver The Smile Project under the Core 20 Strategy. The project aim was to improve the oral health and wellbeing knowledge of primary age children living in Rushmoor areas affected by health inequalities. We learned the great value of youth volunteering through the recruitment of volunteer Ambassadors from Wavell School, Farnborough Technical College and Farnborough 6th form College who were supported by adult Mentors with experience in dentistry and/or working with young people.

Together, the team delivered positive health messaging to over 700 primary aged children through focussed assemblies and interactive activity sessions.

## Supporting Independence

**Community Transport:** For much of the year we operated with under a cloud of uncertainty; awaiting decisions from Hampshire County Council (HCC) on the continuation of our Community Transport services following the recent consultation. As part of their SP25 consultation HCC had proposed to terminate all Community Transport services as a cost saving measure to meet growing budget pressures. The decisions on these proposals were delayed due to the general election, so we didn't learn the outcome of the consultation until October.

The good news was that Community Transport had been saved for the residents and community groups of Hampshire. Interestingly, Rushmoor was cited as one of the consultation's most prolific responders.

RVS hosted a meeting with passengers and HCC officers to ensure the voices of those most in need of the services, were heard. However, we subsequently spent the remainder of the year waiting for the tender opportunity to be published and to see whether RVS were successful in their bid. I am delighted to confirm that we were, and that new contracts will begin on 1st September 2025.

During the year, we delivered 7,678 passenger journeys for people who are unable to use or do not have access to public transport and provided 538 minibus hires to community groups.

**Home Help:** Our Home Help service has continued to provide essential support to those most in need, to remain independent and continue living at home. Clients have benefitted from an increasing number of hours of assistance with shopping and housework. Our team of 22 Home Helps have provided a smiling face and support with housework/cleaning for residents and delivered over 8,200 hours of service. This increase is despite the need to reluctantly increase our charges to the residents, and we are pleased that this did not have too much of a detrimental effect in service levels, which is testament to how valuable and professional the service is.

**Social Inclusion:** Befriending & buddying is a valuable and much needed service for Rushmoor residents providing support phone calls and befriending visits. 410 hours of support were provided by a team of 24 volunteers. Most beneficiaries are socially isolated or confined to their homes and this light touch support can make all the difference.

**Incorporating the Farnborough Lunch Club:** Due to the retirement of longstanding volunteers, the previous lunch club closed in late 2023, reducing the social connectivity for a group of long-standing, elderly members. RVS stepped in and offered support to start a new local weekly lunch club in February 2024 to re-engage with this group, as there are very few other opportunities available for this group of individuals who value the companionship. Working in partnership with the Farnborough Gate Bowls club, our group members meet weekly, and we facilitate socialising, refreshments, activities, occasional outings and guest speakers. Over the year the club has increased the membership to 20 attendees. We offer fully accessible transport and a trained driver for those who otherwise would not be able to access the club.

We have seen how this regular get together facilitated by RVS staff and volunteers makes such a difference to the members lives. We were able to offer outings to a Christmas lunch and a pub lunch in the Spring; these outings were a real highlight in the calendar.

**Wellbeing Walks:** The second year of the walks programme saw further development. Six walks have run each week across Farnborough and Aldershot. On a lovely sunny (but not too hot!) day, we can welcome up to 18 walkers. The walks offer gentle exercise and progressive exercise whilst socialising in the local community, thanks to our committed team of volunteer Walk Leaders.

**Hampshire HIV Support:** The service contracted via TVPS has continued to provide support to residents living with HIV in North Hampshire. More complex cases have emerged this year with more people experiencing poverty or struggling with housing issues.

As this was the final year of funding, we are very grateful to the Trustees of TVPS, not only for the support provided over recent years, but also because they have agreed to fund a further year of support in 25/26.

**Environmental Projects:** The team at RVS have worked hard to reduce the environmental impact of RVS service delivery. Following a “deep dive” audit of our work and setting out our processes, we were delighted to achieve a Silver “Investment in the Environment” accreditation.

This is a national environmental accreditation scheme designed to help organisations save time and money, reduce their impact on the environment, and get recognition for their progress. We are committed to sharing our learning with RVS members and are considering the next steps to achieve this.

**Blooming Marvellous:** It is well documented that the benefits of community gardening include reducing depression and anxiety, promoting recovery from stress, and helping people to develop social relationships. Gardening can offer these benefits by providing a distraction from everyday stresses and demands, by immersing people in nature, promoting physical activity, encouraging social interactions, and providing a sense of purpose and meaning.

Over the year, 19 individuals have been supported to volunteer in community gardening by a dedicated team of staff and volunteers. Together they have completed 75 maintenance sessions in nine community gardens and tidied 32 private gardens for people who were unable to do this for themselves.

The team took on an additional plot at Cove Green Allotments which was put into growing beds. Through this and the plots in Aldershot, an excess of fresh produce weighing 73 kilos was donated to local food banks.

Recognition for their hard work and community contribution was given by way of some valued awards:

- South & Southeast in Bloom, Level 5 Outstanding for the Community Garden category.
- Rushmoor Community in Bloom, Gold for the allotment for Best Community Garden.
- Rushmoor Community in Bloom, Gold for Most Unusual Planted Container.
- Rushmoor Community in Bloom, an ‘outstanding achievement’ award for all that Blooming Marvellous do in the local community.

**Rushmoor Community in Bloom:** An increasing number of gardeners across the Borough entered this year’s competition, showcasing wonderful gardens that celebrate our green spaces, both at home and in our community. The competition aims to encourage a greener, more environmentally friendly approach to gardening, creating habitats for wildlife and promoting sustainable gardening practices.

In July, 74 community gardens, wildlife gardens, front gardens, hanging baskets, unusual planted containers and school gardens were judged. Those shortlisted were invited to join the uplifting Awards Evening event in September.

We are most grateful to our partners and sponsors for enabling this fabulous event to happen - <https://www.rvs.org.uk/rushmoor-community-in-bloom/> and <https://www.rvs.org.uk/rushmoor-community-in-bloom-schools-competition/>

**Hampshire Communities for People and Planet Project:** RVS worked with Action Hampshire to contribute to the Hampshire County Council’s “Communities People and Planet” Project, involving community groups across the county.

We partnered with The Vine and Rushmoor Accessible Action Group (RAAG) to engage with older people, disabled people and people experiencing mental health issues. The work aimed to improve understanding

of their perceptions of climate action, what actions they already take that benefit the planet, what further action they would like to take and what the barriers are for their communities.

The feedback was really thought provoking and can be found in the final report - [Hampshire-Communities-for-People-and-Planet.pdf](#) . The report summarises how those communities who are contributing less to climate change, due to barriers, are more likely to feel the effects and identifies how communities could be better enabled to take collective and individual action for the climate.

**Blooming Minds:** Green social prescribing is one of the ways in which person-centred care is now delivered. It involves linking and then supporting people to engage in a nature based, community activity to improve their mental and physical health. Under new NHS England guidance, GPs are urged to stop writing repeat prescriptions for patients and are expected to use social prescribing instead. Healthcare providers are realising that Green Social Prescribing is the first go-to for many patients and can be used to prevent further deterioration of mental health.

In consultation with local Social Prescribers, we developed Blooming Minds, a ten-week, pre-planned support programme, based on activities in nature. It was developed in accordance with the National Academy of Social Prescribing's Green Social Prescribing Toolkit. The programme is time-limited and focussed, with referrals only accepted from, or verified with, professionals.

We ran two successful programmes in the year. Through impact assessments, each participant clearly indicated that intervention through attending a social group and engaging with nature had engendered feelings of increased self-confidence and resilience, reduced social isolation and had a positive impact on health-related conditions through moderate exercise.

We would like to thank Reg's Garden for hosting the programme.

**Rushmoor Green Community Forum:** The Forum has continued to meet quarterly and gained strength in its commitment and membership. Members took part in Rushmoor Great Big Green Week. There was a good variety of activities and events taking place throughout the week from community gardening, insect trails, bug hunts, bat walks, litter picks, yoga, orienteering, family picnics and workshops promoting the reduction of single use plastics.

**Farnborough Rotary Access Garden (FRAG):** We are grateful to the Farnborough Airport Fund, the Shanley Foundation and the Leader of HCC for the funding to redevelop FRAG. It was originally created to offer a space for people of all abilities to use, however a few access challenges remained. Due to its limited use over the last few years, it has become weathered and in need of repair. Our refurbishment project is creating a sustainable, welcoming space and improved access to the allotments, including a proper ramp for wheelchair access making it a more accessible space to host community groups, including those with access needs.

Our plans include the installation on of a dry compost toilet and solar lighting. The development of FRAG will enable us to run workshops on site during the winter and offer the workshop space to other likeminded projects. We aim to keep our carbon footprint as low as possible.

**Frank Rust Memorial Grant:** Twelve applications were received in total seeking funding for a range of garden projects within school grounds. The annual Frank Rust Memorial School Grants were awarded to St Mark's Junior School (£350) and Talavera Infants School (£895).

## Partnerships

**Rushmoor Borough Council:** We continue to work alongside RBC's Community and Partnerships team which currently supports our partnership working, although devolution and the reorganisation of the Local Authorities is obviously creating a distraction and more uncertainty at the present time.

We actively contribute to the Supporting Communities and Community Recovery groups, and we will endeavour to remain a proactive and strong partner to the Council.

**Community Infrastructure Partnership (CIP) CIC:** For many years, Hampshire County Council's Infrastructure Grant has significantly contributed to the core activities of the CVSs across the county. As this was lost from 31st March 2025, the Hampshire CVS Network, as we have previously known it, also ceased to exist.

From 1st April, the Community Infrastructure Partnership (CIP) came to the fore to lead the network of local organisations, supporting and representing the Voluntary Community Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector across Hampshire. As an established partnership, the CIP brings together a trusted alliance of unique areas of expertise and approaches from across the county, to provide a shared strength for the communities we serve. Rushmoor Voluntary Services is a founder member of the CIP and we have a strong, trusted relationship with our partner members: Action Hampshire, Basingstoke Voluntary Action, Hart Voluntary Action, One Community and Unity. The CIP will continue working with the other Hampshire LIOs, as appropriate.

We also took the opportunity to align with our umbrella body NAVCA, and the majority of similar organisations in the UK in adopting the description of being Local Infrastructure Organisations (LIO) moving away from the traditional CVS - [NAVCA | What our members do](#). This doesn't impact upon what we do, just how we are described. You will have seen this change in our communications in 2025.

**Frimley Integrated Care Board (ICB):** RVS continues to be involved in the Integrated Care Partnership (ICP) which brings together organisations, professionals and elected representatives who hold the responsibility for the development of Frimley Health and Care Strategy.

The ICP not only creates the conditions for this broad range of partners to examine and tackle the wider determinants of health and wellbeing for residents, but also for promoting effective partnership working with the voluntary sector.

We have worked closely with the team in Northeast Hants and Farnham Place to explore opportunities to reduce health inequalities in our area.

**Frimley VCSE Alliance:** A legal requirement of each ICB, the overarching aim of the Frimley VCSE Alliance is to connect VCSE groups from across the sector, who will then be represented and 'at the table' in planning health strategies for Frimley ICB.

The Frimley VCSE Alliance was launched at an on-line event on 16th July and has hosted several networking events and opportunities to contribute toward health/system focused consultations. Themed subgroups have regularly met to consider the needs of children, older people and those with learning disability, autism and wider neurodiversity. Grants have been secured to support groups and funding for the Alliance has been secured to March 2026.

**Thank you!** I would like to take this opportunity to say a huge thank you to our supporters for working with us throughout the year to champion a vibrant and diverse voluntary sector across Rushmoor. To our core funders - Rushmoor Borough Council and Hampshire County Council - we offer our gratitude for continuing to believe in the role RVS has to serve as a strategic community partner. We thank all our funders for providing the resources to support our vibrant community. I'd like to thank our members for all that you do for our communities' day in and day out, and of course, to all the volunteers in Rushmoor who make it happen! I'd like to offer a final, but most sincere, thank you to the Trustees and staff of RVS.