VCSE
EAST SUSSEX ALLIANCE

East Sussex Voluntary, Community & Social Enterprise (VCSE) Sector Alliance

Membership Agreement

April 2026

1. Scope and purpose

This Membership Agreement was agreed by the 15 founding members of the Alliance and was reviewed and revised by members in April 2026. It is made up of 32 of the county's VCSE organisations who have come together with a commitment to the following purpose, vision and mission. Current members are listed in Appendix Two.

Purpose

To speak as one voice, to influence and promote the importance of the VCSE sector, to increase our influence and trust amongst partners.

All members are active participants and agree to commit to work according to the following principles:

1. **Collaboration** - the VCSE sector is a natural home of co-operation and partnership; we commit to developing collaborations in a way that is consistent with the values of our sector.
2. **Accountability** - Alliance members make a commitment to ensure equality of access to our services and to adhere to inclusion best practices.
3. **Generous Leadership** – members seek benefits for the wider voluntary sector, especially small, local community organisations. We value approaches that are user-led and seek to draw on the strengths and assets of local organisations and communities.

Vision

To have created an ecosystem where services are designed, commissioned and delivered in true collaboration between the East Sussex VCSE and statutory partners for the benefit of our communities and wider voluntary sector.

Mission

We will tackle inequality and injustice in society by developing our strategic relationships and working with statutory partners to empower people and communities to have control of their own lives and ensure equality of access to our services for everyone.

This Agreement provides a framework for Alliance members to work collaboratively together and with other partners. It may be modified at any time by agreement of a simple majority of members.

2. Membership criteria

Applications for membership of the Alliance can be made by completing the Alliance Application Form –please state which level of membership best suits your organisation and if a Full or Executive Member, which priority you would like to progress as part of a working group. (See Appendix One for full details of membership levels, commitments and benefits). Please return the form to: esvcsealliance@escv.org.uk

A) Full Membership

Organisations may join the Alliance as full members if they meet the following membership criteria:

- They are independently constituted community, voluntary or social enterprise organisations
- They work to support beneficiaries and communities living across the county of East Sussex
- They have a physical presence, are embedded within local communities and are delivering in-person services in East Sussex, not solely online services which might be delivered by local or national organisations
- They work with the Alliance agreed principles of 'Collaborative Working', 'Accountability' and 'Generous Leadership'
- They have the capacity to commit to actively participate in Alliance activities, to represent the Alliance at Partnership Boards, meetings and Steering Groups
- Commit to joining a working group to support and progress one key priority area of work
- Opportunity to be an Alliance representative at system meetings and working groups
- Signs up to Alliance criteria of achieving neutrality in a dual role
- Attend in-person Alliance meetings every 3 months

B) Executive Membership

Organisations may join the Alliance as Executive Members if they meet the following membership criteria:

- They are independently constituted community, voluntary or social enterprise organisations
- They work to support beneficiaries and communities living across the county of East Sussex
- They have a physical presence, are embedded within local communities and are delivering in- person services in East Sussex, not solely online services which might be delivered by local or national organisations
- They work with the Alliance agreed Principles of 'Collaborative Working', 'Accountability' and 'Generous Leadership'
- They have the capacity to lead on developing and delivering a key priority area of work
- Drive systems change, influence and coordinate partnership working with key stakeholders
- Opportunity to be an Alliance representative at system meetings and working groups
- Signs up to Alliance criteria of achieving neutrality in a dual role
- Attend monthly Teams Executive meetings and quarterly in-person Full meetings

C) Alliance Associate

Organisations may join the Alliance as an Alliance Associate if they meet the following criteria:

- They are independently constituted community, voluntary or social enterprise organisations
- They work to support beneficiaries often in more localised communities in East Sussex
- They work with the Alliance agreed Principles of 'Collaborative Working', 'Accountability' and 'Generous Leadership'
- They have a physical presence, are embedded within local communities and are delivering in-person services in East Sussex, not solely online services which might be delivered by local or national organisations
- Opportunity to buddy up with an Executive or Full member and be an Alliance representative at system meetings and working groups
- Signs up to Alliance criteria of achieving neutrality in a dual role
- They wish to be an active participant in partnership activities of the Alliance and benefit from shared learning, best practice and collaboration opportunities

The Alliance Development Manager will inform existing Alliance members of any new applications for Full and Executive membership or requests to become Alliance Associates.

Decisions to accept new members or associates will be made by all existing Alliance members based upon applications meeting all stated criteria for membership with a simple majority agreement of members at the meeting (in person or by proxy) following receipt of the application form.

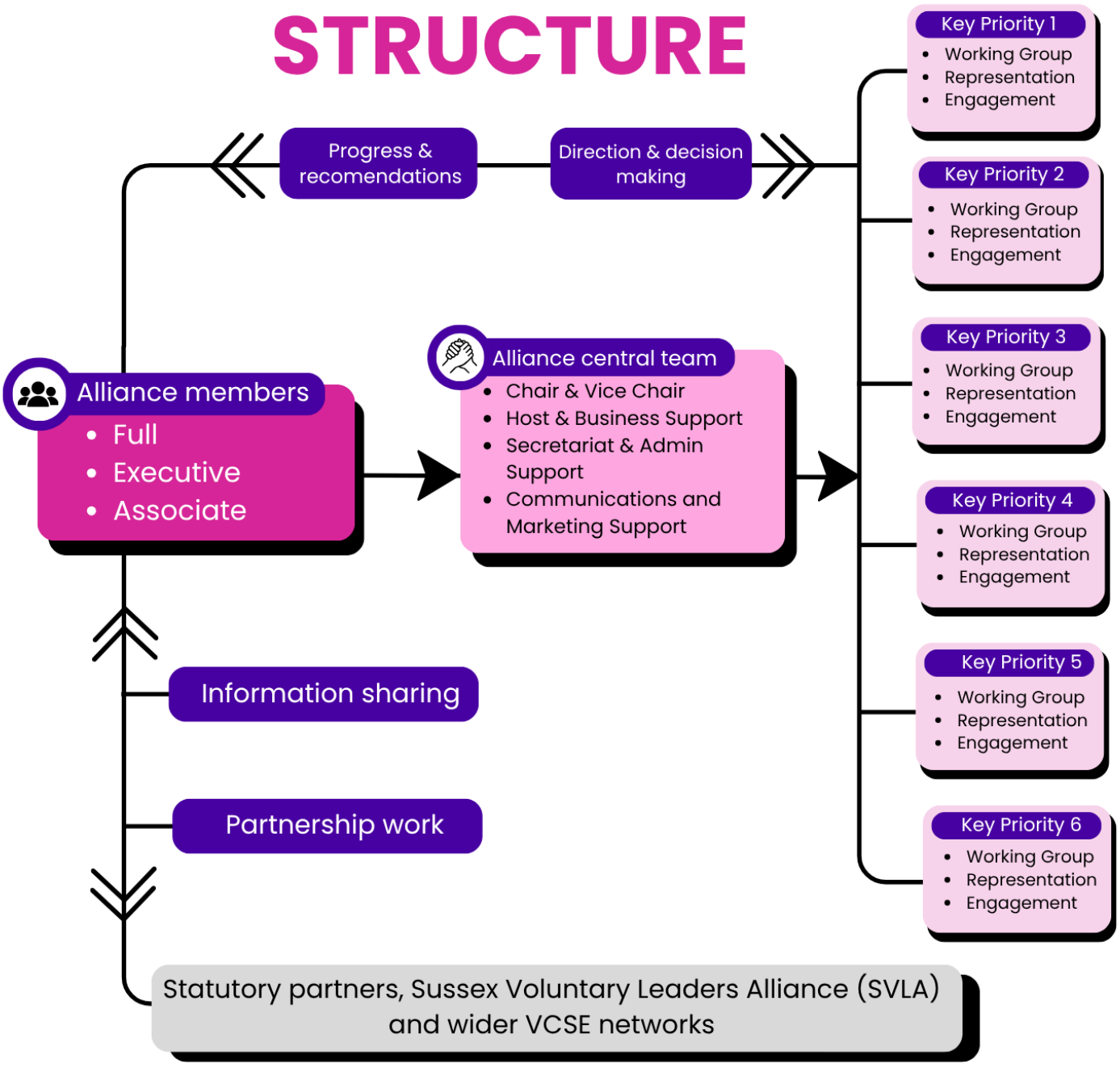
3. Benefits of Alliance Executive & Full membership

- Enhancing benefits we offer to our local communities
- More strategic relationship with statutory partners
- Making more effective use of assets and resources
- A shared commitment to high quality services
- Opportunities for income generation, inward investment and Social Capital
- Reduced duplication and competition
- Building trust among partners
- Opening up partnership opportunities across a wider geography

4. Benefits of being an Alliance Associate

- Access to information and advice available to Alliance members
- Opportunity to comment on draft Alliance position papers
- Opportunity to be an Alliance representative at system meetings and working groups
- Enhanced opportunities for partnership working with Alliance members and associates
- Priority invitations to attend Alliance events and activities, benefit from networking

ALLIANCE STRUCTURE



5. Principles for Alliance working

Alliance members and associates commit to work according to the following principles:

1. Alliance members agree to work to the principles of collaborative working, accountability and generous leadership.

2. The VCSE is a natural home of co-operation and partnership and we will develop collaborations in a way that is consistent with the values of our sector.

3. We work to empower people and communities to have control of their own lives. We value approaches that are bottom-up, user led and seek to draw on the strengths and assets of local communities.

4. We will tackle inequality and injustice and ensure equality of access to our services for members of all communities. Alliance members make a commitment to adhere to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion best practices.

5. We seek benefits for the wider voluntary sector, especially small, local community organisations that form a crucial part of social capital in the county, not individual organisations.

6. We will develop shared funding opportunities between Alliance members and with other partners including smaller VCSE organisations.

7. VCSE Alliance members will not use any shared information or data for commercial advantage or to the financial or commercial detriment of the original supplier of the information.

8. Members of the VCSE Alliance will act with highest degree of integrity, honesty, diligence, responsibility and in accordance with applicable laws.

9. Members work with and for local communities, with offices and services located in East Sussex.

10. Any information shared in confidence or any information believed to be of a confidential nature should not be disclosed. It is the responsibility of the author or speaker to be explicit around the status of information shared.

11. We seek to build the resilience of the sector so it can thrive and withstand change.

6. Working together on shared priorities

Alliance members commit to working collaboratively to address the priorities that they agree. We will also work with statutory and private sector partners to align our priorities where possible. *These priorities and examples are periodically reviewed by Alliance members at Development Workshops.*

Current priorities	Examples
1. Reduce demand on acute services and increase prevention activity, improve sector resilience	Financial Inclusion & Sector Resilience working group
2. Promoting wellbeing and resilience through reducing poverty, isolation and distress	Financial Inclusion Communications Strategy Engagement and Intelligence gathering
3. Improve children & young people services	Partnerships with statutory initiatives
4. Tackling Inequality in Health & Care	Partnerships with NHS, work with communities
5. Co-design of services	Collaboration with statutory commissioners
6. Embedding 'Collaborative Commissioning: Alliance First principle' with partners	Practical implementation of Commissioning Excellence Programme Principles
7. Equality, Diversity & Inclusion	Embed in governance via Alliance EDI Charter

7. Duties and responsibilities of being an Alliance representative

Responsible for representing the Alliance and wider voluntary sector, not individual organisations. Facilitating communication, strategic dialogue and influence between public sector organisations and members. Accurately represent the views and other agreed messages of Alliance members, which have been agreed via Alliance meetings or other means. Promote the voluntary sector as a whole and seek to create opportunities for further positive conversations and turning words into action. Provide feedback to members, updating on key messages, outcomes and opportunities to pursue, as appropriate (see 'Representation Role Description' for more detail).

Members of the Alliance will respond to requests for agenda items, submit views and opinions and generally prepare Alliance representatives for attending meetings so members can genuinely represent the Alliance view.

8. Termination of membership

Alliance membership or associate status may be terminated by a simple majority vote of Alliance members who will follow the agreed Termination of Membership Policy (see Appendix Three) – this will only be followed where there are reasonable grounds. Examples of when memberships may be terminated are:

- Where an Alliance member/associate does not demonstrate or work to the agreed principles of 'Collaborative Working', 'Accountability' and 'Generous Leadership'
- Where an Alliance member/associate acts in a way that brings the Alliance into disrepute
- Where an Alliance member/associate does not attend three or more consecutive appropriate membership level meetings without providing a reasonable reason for absence
- Where an Alliance member/associate operates for private gain over public good
- Where an Alliance member/associate shares or uses confidential information for their own or organisational gain

Appendix One

Three membership levels:
Executive, Full and Associate - commitment, engagement and benefits

Commitment & benefits of membership	Chair/Vice Chair/Host	Executive	Full	Associate
Days per month (approx.)	4	2	1	1/2
Attend Alliance meetings	Two weekly (via Teams)	Monthly (via Teams)	Quarterly (in person)	Six-monthly (in person)
Agenda planning	✓			
Manage ESCC contract and reporting	✓			
Chair Alliance meetings	✓			
Support Alliance Dev. Officer	✓			
Lead on strategic relationships	✓	✓		
Lead on key priorities	✓	✓		
Lead on VA community network engagement	✓	✓		
Oversee programmes of work	✓	✓		
Coordinate partnership working	✓	✓		
Host in-person meetings	✓	✓		
Voting rights	✓	✓	✓	
Join working group, deliver key programmes of work	✓	✓	✓	
Represent Alliance: feedback on Boards, Partnerships, Steering Groups	✓	✓	✓	
Collaborate on funding bids	✓	✓	✓	
Become Alliance Mentor	✓	✓	✓	
Draft position papers	✓	✓	✓	
Review/comment on draft position papers	✓	✓	✓	✓
Opportunities for partnership working	✓	✓	✓	✓
Newsletter contribution	✓	✓	✓	✓
Access to information, opportunities, learning	✓	✓	✓	✓
Networking	✓	✓	✓	✓
Priority invitations to Alliance events, activities	✓	✓	✓	✓

Appendix Two

Current Executive, Full and Associate members of the East Sussex VCSE Alliance

1. Action In Rural Sussex (AIRS)
2. Age UK East Sussex
3. Amaze
4. Bexhill & Battle Foodbank
5. BHT Sussex
6. Brighton Women's Centre (BWC)
7. Care for the Carers
8. Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)
9. Compass Arts
10. Demelza
11. Diversity Resource International (DRI)
12. East Sussex Community Voice (ESCV)
13. East Sussex Vision Support
14. Hastings Advice and Representation Centre (HARC)
15. Hastings Community Network (HCN)
16. Jigsaw South-East
17. Little Gate Farm
18. Lotus
19. Possability People
20. Rotherfield St Martin
21. Seaview
22. Southdown Housing
23. Sussex Community Development Association (SCDA)
24. The Advocacy People
25. The Pelham

Three Voluntary Actions in East Sussex

26. Community Action
27. Hastings Voluntary Action (HVA)
28. Rother Voluntary Action (RVA)

29. Warming up the Homeless
30. Wave
31. Wayfinder Woman
32. Wealden Volunteering

Appendix three

Termination of Membership Policy and Procedure

1. Purpose

This policy sets out the principles, grounds, and procedure for the termination of membership or Associate status of the East Sussex Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Alliance (“the Alliance”). It ensures that any decision to terminate membership is fair, transparent, proportionate, and consistent with the Alliance’s values and governance arrangements.

2. Scope

This policy applies to:

• All current Alliance Full and Executive members

• All organisations holding Associate status

3. Principles

All Alliance members commit to the principles set out in Section 5 of the Membership Agreement, including:

• Collaborative Working

• Accountability

• Generous Leadership

Termination of membership will only be considered where there are reasonable grounds and where informal resolution is not appropriate, successful, or proportionate.

4. Grounds for termination

Membership or Associate status may be reviewed and potentially terminated where an organisation:

- Does not demonstrate or work to the agreed Alliance principles
- Acts in a way that brings the Alliance into disrepute
- Fails to attend three or more consecutive meetings appropriate to their membership level without providing a reasonable explanation
- Operates primarily for private gain over public good
- Shares or misuses confidential Alliance information for individual or organisational gain

This list is not exhaustive.

5. Authority and decision-making

Termination of membership requires:

- A fair review process, followed by
- A simple majority vote of Alliance members, and
- Ratification in line with Alliance decision-making arrangements

6. Termination of Membership Procedure

The following procedure will be followed where a potential termination issue is identified.

Stage 1: Identification and initial review

1. The Alliance Core Team (Chair, Vice Chair, Host Organisation, Alliance Development Manager) is notified of behaviour or activity that may warrant a review of membership.
2. The Alliance Development Manager (ADM) requests and gathers any relevant supporting information from:
    - The individual or organisation raising the concern, and
    - The member organisation concerned (where appropriate).

Stage 2: Assessment

3. The ADM undertakes a desktop review of all information received alongside the Membership Agreement to assess whether there are reasonable grounds to proceed.
4. Where appropriate, the Chair, Vice Chair, Host Organisation, and ADM meet with the member organisation to:
    - Explain the concerns clearly
    - Reference relevant parts of the Membership Agreement
    - Provide the organisation with an opportunity to respond and give clarification

Stage 3: Escalation to membership

5. If the concerns are deemed to be upheld, an All-Members Alliance meeting is convened as soon as reasonably possible.
6. All Alliance members are provided with:
    - Relevant supporting information, and
    - The applicable sections of the Membership Agreement
7. Members review the information in advance of and during the meeting.

Stage 4: Decision and ratification

8. Alliance members vote in the meeting to either:
    - Retain membership, or
    - Withdraw membership
      A simple majority vote applies.
9. The decision is ratified with the wider membership via email.

Stage 5: Notification and record-keeping

10. The Chair and/or Vice Chair, supported by the Alliance Development Manager, informs the affected organisation of the decision via:
    - A formal meeting (e.g. Teams call), followed by
    - Written confirmation.

11. The Alliance Development Manager records the decision and updates:
    - Membership records
    - Governance and public-facing documents as required.

7. Review of policy

This policy will be reviewed periodically to ensure it remains appropriate, fair, and aligned with the Alliance's governance arrangements.

Further information

For general information about the Alliance and how to join, please contact esvcsealliance@escv.org.uk

Contact details for the East Sussex VCSE Alliance Chair, Vice Chair and Alliance Development Manager:

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