



Health and Wellbeing Board

Date: Wednesday, 24 September 2025
Time: 2.00 pm
Venue: Meeting Room 1, County Hall, Dorchester, DT1 1XJ

Members (Quorum: 5)

Steve Robinson (Chair), Patricia Miller (Vice-Chair), Clare Sutton, Gill Taylor, Paula Bennetts, Jan Britton, Sam Crowe, Paul Dempsey, Stewart Dipple, Margaret Guy, Marc House, Martin Longley, Jonathan Price and Simone Yule

Chief Executive: Catherine Howe, County Hall, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 1XJ

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Meeting Contact 01305 224185 - george.dare@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

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Agenda

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	To consider a report by the Deputy Director of Public Health and Prevention and the Thriving Communities Partnership Manager.	

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Dorset Health and Wellbeing Board

24 September 2025

Thriving Communities

For Review and Consultation

Cabinet Member:

Cllr S Robinson, Adult Social Care

Local Councillor(s):

Senior Leadership Team:

S Crowe, Director of Public Health & Prevention

Report author and job title: Rachel Partridge & Dave Thorp

Job Title: Deputy Director of Public Health and Prevention; Thriving Communities

Partnership Manager

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Statutory Authority:

Report status: Public

1. Executive summary

1.1 Through work with the Integrated Care Partnership, in June 2023 a brief proposal was presented to the DHWB, to support place-based working in the Dorset Council area. The aim was to develop a plan to grow community support and capacity through the VCS, to support older people to remain living well and independently.

1.2 In June 2024, the Dorset Health and Wellbeing Board (DHWB) approved the development of a Project Delivery and Transition Plan for creation of a Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) led Dorset Thriving Communities Network (DTCN) model to support place-based working in the Dorset Council area.

1.3 The Thriving Communities project, through which the report was developed, was provided support, direction, and guidance from a multi-agency Thriving Communities Reference Group (TCRG). That group included representatives from Dorset Council; NHS Dorset; the VCS and Dorset Fire and Rescue Service.

1.4 The involvement of such a broad TCRG has ensured that Thriving Communities is designed to support the Dorset Council, Communities for All priority whilst also aligning closely with other ICS priorities and programmes.

1.5 Following detailed research and engagement the multiagency TCRG recommended presentation of the Project Report and Forward Plan (April 2024) to the DHWB. That report provided the DHWB with compelling evidence for the development of a DTCN.

1.6 It was identified that, through the growth of a DTCN led by the VCS and supported by a partnership of Dorset Council, NHS Dorset, Public Health Dorset, the VCS and other partners, the relevant VCS infrastructures could be strengthened and the local groups who support older people could become more resilient and effective. The DTCN would also create potential to support the VCS in some of its challenges around leadership, development, governance, and administration.

1.7 The innovative and comprehensive nature of the research phase resulted in an invitation for presentation at the South West Public Health Scientific Conference in March 2025.

1.8 The TCRG recognised that the original budget would not provide longevity of the recommended model and additional funding would be required. Therefore, a proof-of-concept plan entitled Implementing the Foundation Phase (Appendix A), was developed and a lead VCS organisation appointed.

1.9 The TCRG also identified the need for transformation in the way Dorset Council and other partners work with the VCS.

1.10 This paper provides the DHWB with a summary of progress into a Foundation Phase, which is supported by the TCRG, and provides a recommendation for the portfolio holder to provide a further update report with recommendations in 12 months.

2. Recommendation(s)

2.1 The Dorset Health & Wellbeing board note the development of the foundation phase and approve the submission of an update report and recommendations following the first-year evaluation

3. Reason for the recommendation(s)

3.1 The Project Report and Forward Plan presented to the DHWB was developed through detailed research and a comprehensive, cross-sector collaboration on engagement which captured detailed views of over 250 participants and involved 75 VCS organisations. Evidence of effective practice both nationally and locally identified clear opportunities to support the VCS and reduce pressure on health and social care services. The evaluated programmes examined in the research were able to evidence the preventative benefits of their work.

“If the hubs did not exist, 50% of hub members said they would have approached a health care provider for support.”

Source: Cornwall Voluntary Sector Forum, Volunteer Cornwall, Cornwall, and Isles of Scilly Care Board – Community Hub Evaluation Report 2023.

3.2 With substantial growth in the over 65 population in Dorset predicted this decade there will be an inevitable impact on demand for health and care services. Without a significant, positive change in approach our already stretched public services will face substantial increases of demand on resources. Therefore, driving forward a preventative and supportive agenda with the VCS to support older people is vital.

3.3 The DTCN will also provide strong evidence in support of Dorset for Age Friendly Communities.

3.4 The TCRG support the proof-of-concept approach which is to be delivered within the original £309,000 budget. However, it is recognised by the reference group that the full Project Delivery and Transition Plan will require longer term commitment and resources from Dorset Council and ICS partner organisations.

4. The report

4.1 Traditionally, registered charities have been a recognised cornerstone of the VCS, but the landscape is far more diverse and dynamic. The VCS encompasses a wide array of not-for-profit entities, including social enterprises, community interest companies, community benefit societies, and faith groups. In addition, numerous small community groups, micro-providers, and individuals, though lacking formal structures, play an essential and active role within the sector.

4.2 This diversity is one of the VCS's greatest strengths, enabling local, tailored, and responsive support across communities. However, it also presents significant challenges for larger public service organisations attempting to engage and fund the sector effectively.

4.3 The existing model for VCS infrastructure support is primarily delivered through infrastructure organisations—charities and community interest companies funded to bolster the broader VCS. However, in Dorset these organisations have not been empowered with a sector-wide mandate for formal representation, which a more centralised body, such as a sector assembly, could provide.

4.4 The Voluntary and Community Assembly (VCSA) now offers a potential platform for everyone in Dorset's VCS to actively participate in addressing key local issues. The VCSA could provide a streamlined entry point into the sector's complex landscape, fostering greater representation, stronger connections within the VCS, and enhanced collaboration with other sectors. Managed by a Governance Board, the VCSA may ensure that the Assembly's operations align with the goals and needs of the VCS. As it matures, the VCSA is expected to bring invaluable clarity to the sector's infrastructure and service delivery layers, enhancing communication, representation, and engagement both within the VCS and with external partners.

4.5 Dorset's VCS is also supported by additional, less formal, layers of infrastructure, all of which are crucial in supporting older people and communities. From well-established infrastructure organisations to individual neighbourhood volunteers, the

VCS provides the foundational support needed to build thriving communities. To do so effectively, these groups require essential resources—from accessible locations and suitable facilities to proportional funding, insurance, training, governance, and the dedication of trusted local leaders.

4.6 Despite its vital role, the VCS faces persistent challenges that hamper its ability to expand capacity and capability. These challenges contribute to sector fragility, isolation, and burnout.

4.7 Through extensive research and a creative engagement collaboration the Thriving Communities initiative has uncovered evidence of effective practices at a national and local level. It has also identified opportunities to alleviate pressure on health and social care services while increasing healthy life expectancy.

4.8 Throughout the engagement process, there was a clear message that local groups and charities are indispensable for maintaining a bright outlook for older people in the area. However, without investment and support, the future could deteriorate, exacerbating challenges in health and social care.

4.9 It was identified that, through the growth of a DTCN, VCS infrastructures could be strengthened and the local groups who support older people could become more resilient and effective. The DTCN would also create potential for further collaborative work and development.

4.10 The development of the DTCN Foundation Phase offers a transformative approach to community support, ensuring that the VCS remains a vital and dynamic force in helping older people and the broader community thrive.

4.11 Delivering the Foundation Phase:

4.12 The Foundation Phase will be initiated for 24 months in 3 geographic areas which will align to and support the development of Integrated Neighbourhood Teams and other relevant programme of work. It will be cognisant of the Day Opportunities programme and will align with and form an integral part of the Age Friendly Programme.

4.13 The Foundation Phase will be delivered in partnership and will have 3 layers

Layer 1. Working with the Voluntary and Community Sector Assembly

The VCSA provides a sound strategic oversight function which could simplify working with the VCS and help deliver the Dorset Council - Communities for All strategic priority. The Thriving Communities Reference Group is supportive of working directly with the VCSA to promote, develop and evaluate the Foundation Phase.

Layer 2. Developing, coordinating and supporting the network

Volunteer Centre Dorset will work with the Thriving Communities Partnership Manager to develop the foundation DTCNs and will then coordinate all

development activity. The coordinating function will provide a single point of contact into the network and will also manage all grants and monitor performance.

A contract has been awarded which provides the Volunteer Centre Dorset with £40,000.00 per annum for a 2-year period to develop and grow the networks.

Layer 3. Support and service at a place-based level

To support local groups working with older people small grants will be provided to provide health and wellbeing services within local communities. There will be a series of requirements for participation which will include adopting an action plan. The total grant pot provided for further dissemination over 2 years is £132,000.00, or £66,000.00 per annum.

The funding provided for grants may be used flexibly to meet costs associated with providing support within local communities but will be subject to control and monitoring.

4.14 Timeline:

July 2025 – Contract awarded to Volunteer Centre Dorset

September 2025 – Foundation Networks commence formation

September 2026 – 12-month evaluation completed Report presented to Reference Group and Dorset Health and Wellbeing Board.

4.15 Clear performance, reporting and development criteria will be created for members of the network with simple processes and standards implemented.

4.16 Project measurements:

Network Development & Engagement

- Number of locality-based Thriving Communities Networks established in the 3 priority areas (Weymouth, North Dorset, Purbeck)
- Number of Community Stakeholders and VCS organisations recruited into the network
- Percentage of new or emerging organisations (under 3 years old) supported through the network
- Number of collaborative events (forums, workshops, peer mentoring sessions) delivered per quarter
- Satisfaction rate from participating VCSOs

Impact on Older People

- Estimated number of older people engaged or supported by network member activities

- % of funded organisations delivering early help or preventative activities
- % of projects offering multigenerational activities
- Case studies collected from funded organisations showing impact on health, wellbeing, or independence

Capacity Building & Support

- Number of VCSOs with completed Action Plans
- % of VCSOs showing progress against at least one goal in their Action Plan (based on reviews)
- Number of organisations accessing training, mentoring, or specialist support via the project
- Number of locality-based infrastructure support sessions delivered (online or in-person)

Grant Distribution & Management

- Total value of small grants awarded
- Number of VCSOs receiving grants
- % of funded projects meeting their outcomes (based on monitoring returns)
- Average time from application to grant award

Collaboration & Integration

- Number of partnerships formed or strengthened between VCS and health/social care professionals
- Number of referrals or signposts made between network members and statutory services
- Representation at INT meetings across all 3 areas
- Number of joint initiatives or referrals developed with INTs, PCNs, or community-based health teams

Communication, Learning & Evaluation

- Quarterly monitoring reports completed and submitted to Dorset Council
- Number of VCS insights or trends shared with the Council
- Number of learning reviews held
- Annual evaluation report produced and shared with stakeholders
- Feedback from VCSA, INTs, and Dorset Council confirming project alignment with strategic goals

5. Alternative options considered

- 5.1 A series of options were presented to the Dorset Health and Wellbeing Board in the Project Delivery and Transition Plan

6. Legal considerations

6.1 The Foundation Phase contract has been awarded through a competitive “Request for Quotes” process. Should the programme expand following evaluation there may be a requirement for a full commissioning process.

7. Financial implications

7.1 The Joint Public Health Board agreed to invest part of the shared service underspend from 2021/22 into place-based working. The shared service is funded by contributions from both BCP and Dorset councils’ public health ring-fenced grant. The same conditions apply to any underspend held in reserves as apply to the original grant.

7.2. For the Dorset place-based partnership the share of these funds was £309k. The aim was to support a focused programme of work in line with health and wellbeing priorities.

7.3 The project budget is currently overseen by the Thriving Communities Reference Group with the budget being tightly controlled and as a result the spend of the £309,000 is currently on track and the project will be delivered within budget.

7.4 deliver effective long-term; place-based support, there would need to be a more sustainable longer-term model of funding.

7.5 It is predicted that the original budget will enable the creation of a network of approximately fifteen groups and charities and will provide 24 months support.

8. Natural environment, climate & ecology implications

8.1 Supporting people to stay well and live independently by building strong community networks of support close to their homes should reduce travel and healthcare utilisation - both of which also have the benefits of reducing travel time and costs and in turn have a positive impact on the environment and reducing emissions.

9. Well-being and health implications

9.1 Collaborating with people to understand what keeps them well and healthy, and building capacity in the voluntary and community sector to offer support around these needs, should improve healthy life expectancy – keeping people living for longer in good health. Working in this way to develop person centred approaches should also have benefits for people’s personal sense of wellbeing.

10. Other implications

10.1 Capacity needs to be identified to support this programme through to the completion of the transition process and then in a monitoring capacity.

11. Risk implications

11.1 HAVING CONSIDERED: the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: LOW

Residual Risk: LOW

12. Equalities

12.1 An Equality Impact Assessment with resultant action plan has been completed.

13. Appendices

13.1 Appendix A: Implementing the Foundation Phase

14 Report sign-off

14.1 This report has been through the internal report clearance process and has been signed off by the Director for Legal and Democratic (Monitoring Officer), the Executive Director for Corporate Development (Section 151 Officer) and the appropriate Portfolio Holder(s)

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Thriving Communities

Implementing the Foundation Phase

December 2024

Lead Member:	Steve Robinson
Senior Responsible Officer (SRO)	Rachel Partridge
Project Manager	Thriving Communities Partnership Manager

Version Control

Version	Date	Author	Details of Changes
V 1	16 12 2024	Thriving Communities Partnership Manager	Original draft

1. Purpose

This report provides the implementation process for the foundation phase of the Dorset Thriving Communities Network (DTCN). It follows a significant research and engagement phase; and subsequent approval at the Dorset Health and Wellbeing Board (DHWB) of 4 recommendations contained within the Thriving Communities Report and specifically recommendation 3.

Recommendation 3:

“.....the board to recommend the development of a project delivery and transition plan for Option 3: developing a VCS led Thriving Community Network model as supported by the Thriving Communities Reference Group.”

2. Funding

In 2023 Public Health Dorset agreed through the DHWB to use 2021/22 underspend to support place-based partnership working in each council area. This proposal sees the Dorset Council share which amounts to £309k invested in growing the VCS infrastructure to support this way of working. Although the [Thriving Communities Report](#) recommended long-term investment, this initial foundation phase will provide a 2 year ‘proof of concept’ model on which evaluation will be conducted and will be delivered within the original £309,000 funding.

3. Approach

Thriving Communities will be developed in partnership with the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS), including the Voluntary and Community Sector Assembly (VCSA), to support a joined-up model of locality working, prioritising delivery through prevention and partnership. The DTCNs will work with older people whilst also supporting the creation of all-age friendly environments.

Throughout the Thriving Communities project the “Dorset Council and the Voluntary Community Sector: Principles for Working Together” have been followed. As a result, the information obtained in the research and engagement phase has been rich and reflects the voices of older people in Dorset and those who support them in the VCS. It is therefore proposed that the principles continue to guide the implementation phase, whilst work with the VCSA will underpin the partnership approach.

Any implementation will also take account of current programmes of work across the Integrated Care Network (ICN) and will support the development of Integrated Neighbourhood Teams (INT) through, where possible, aligned place-based development.

The Thriving Communities foundation stage will be developed with town and parish councils, the VCS, our communities and ICS partners.

A lead VCS organisation or partnership will be identified through a transparent award process. Through local engagement and alignment to other ICS programmes 2 or 3 key geographic areas will be identified with the VCS in which the foundation DTCNs will be created. The Thriving Communities Partnership Manager will work with that organisation or partnership through to the foundation DTCNs being established.

The Thriving Communities foundation phase will be designed to provide the base for further development of the network model, facilitating strong, supportive communities and enhanced wellbeing.

4. Project Implementation Timeline

Activity and Actions	Delivery Date
Phase 1 – Project Completion	
Project Delivery and Transition Report	September 2024 (complete)
Foundation Phase Report	December 2025
Contract award process	March 2025
Recommendation to award	April 2025
Phase 2 – Transition	
Creation of DTCN VCS Network coordination function	May 2025
Network community events and communication launch	June 2025
Phase 3 – Network Development	
Initial DTCN established	August 2025
First evaluation	August 2026

5. Thriving Communities Budget:

The table below indicates the spend to date and what is proposed in implementation:

	Project Phase	Date range	Purpose	Allocation	Progress
Aim: Project development to transition into delivery.	Phase 1 - Initiation	Oct - December 23	Project Management	9,000	On track
	Phase 2 - Engagement	Jan - April 24	Project Management	12,000	On track
			Engagement	12,000	On track
	Phase 3	April - June 24	Project Management	6,000	On track
	Phase 4	July - August 24	Project Management	6,000	On track
Total				45,000	
Aim: To implement Dorset Thriving Community Network with 16 Hubs/Groups	Implementation	2025 - 2026	VCS Infrastructure Level 1 (VCSA) including communication, launch and evaluation	10,000	
			VCS Infrastructure Level 2 (coordination, networking and leadership)	80,000	
			VCS Infrastructure Level 3 (grants and local delivery)	132,000	
			Other project and monitoring costs	42,000	
Total				264,000	309,000

Funding through to the end of the implementation stage is taken from the original £309,000 underspend and will result in the provision of a DTCN co-ordinator function within the VCS to create,

lead and coordinate the DTCN. It will also facilitate the creation of the network with up to 15 participating groups and charities for 24 months. The funds will also provide support to the Voluntary and Community Sector Assembly (VCSA) to assist in the creation of the model for delivery of the DTCN, communication, marketing and evaluation. As well as their involvement in steering the creation and implementation of the network.

The implementation layers:

a) VCS Infrastructure level 1 (The VCSA)

The Thriving Communities Partnership Manager will work closely with the VCSA throughout the development of the DTCNs.

The VCSA will be provided funds to assist in the creation of the model for delivery of the DTCN, communication, marketing and evaluation. Following evaluation, the network model may be considered in other areas of health and social care preventative work by the VCS.

b) VCS Infrastructure level 2 (Organisations which support the development of other VCS groups).

Through a transparent award process a group or partnership will be identified to provide the coordinating function for the DTCN. The role will manage all grants and will monitor performance.

The coordinating function will work with the Thriving Communities Partnership Manager to develop the foundation DTCNs and will then coordinate development activity including workshops and the sharing of best practice.

The coordinating function will provide a single point of contact into and from the networks.

c) VCS infrastructure level 3 (The infrastructure of local groups working directly with older people)

Approximately 15 grants would be awarded to the total value of £134,000 to support and grow established groups and charities for 24 months as founding members of the network.

The grants will be awarded based on set criteria which will be developed with the VCS; however, awards of grants will be steered by the Dorset Council Grants Protocol and will have agreed

monitoring criteria and schedules. These grants will specifically enable delivery of service and support which enables older people to live longer healthier lives and to create age friendly environments.

The specification will provide clarity around how the VCS funding provider passes grants onto others and how the grants will be spent and accounted for. The specification will be clear on how to monitor and record what is spent.

The Thriving Communities approach to recording and monitoring will be to simplify processes where it is possible to do so.

5.1 Route to Market

The Thriving Communities team will continue to work with the Dorset Council Commercial and Procurement team to determine the most appropriate/cost effective/best value route. It is anticipated that Dorset Council Contract Procedure Rules could facilitate a direct award to the VCSA.

6. Roles

6.1 Summary Role of Dorset Council monitor (initially Thriving Communities Partnership Manager)

Work alongside DTCN coordinator to create foundation networks

Review contract against agreed criteria

Review progress reporting

Review impact on Dorset Council and ICS priorities

Review and publish evaluation reports

Act as SPOC into any funding partnership

Report to Thriving Communities Reference Group

6.2 Summary role of the VCS lead organisation/partnership

Create a role of DTCN coordinator

Create a partnership launch and communication plan

Work with Thriving Communities Partnership Manager to identify areas and groups to form the foundation DTCNs

Develop and grow a foundation network of groups and organisations which is inclusive and diverse

Ensure standards, reporting and development plans are adhered to

Facilitate networking and development events

Provide direct support to network members

Provide a single point of entry to and with the network

Provide grant funding to network members and monitor compliance

Provide a conduit for communication between the network and partnership

Work closely with the VCSA

Coordinate and produce project performance information for management, monitoring and reporting purposes.

Ensure opportunities for intergenerational activities are integrated throughout the network

6.3 Summary Role of Thriving Community Network Members

Active participation in the network

Providing support and service to older people which deliver on preventative ICS health and care systems priorities which may include:

- Reducing health inequalities
- Preventing hospital admissions
- Enabling prompt discharge
- Delivering anticipatory care assessments and implementing personalised support interventions so people can stay at home in their communities
- Improving physical and mental health and wellbeing

Provide an agreed level of support based on a tiered model

Provide standard, simple monthly performance and cost reports

Work on an action plan for development

Agree to participate in networking and development events

Agree to register for and to receive infrastructure support

7. Resource Requirements:

Thriving Communities Project Management and monitoring

Communications and Engagement Support

Business administration Support

Procurement support

Finance support

Legal service support

8. Proposed Next Phase – December 2024 – End March 2025 – Summary:

Detailed engagement with VCS:

- VCSA
- Infrastructure Organisations
- Charities
- Communities Groups

Maintain information provision and reporting to the Thriving Communities Reference Group

Work directly with the Dorset Council Communities and Partnership Team

Engage with and inform key Dorset Council Directorates and programmes

Engage with and inform key NHS Dorset teams and programmes

Develop and deliver transparent contract award process

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