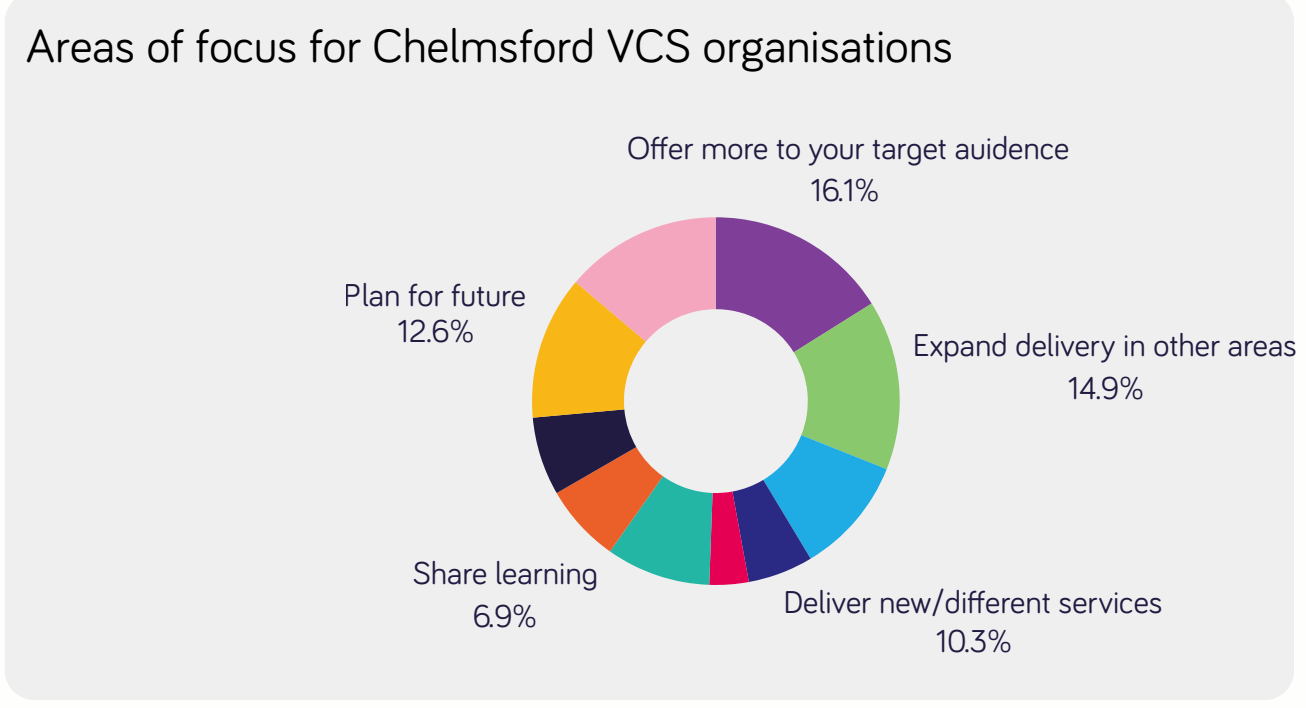
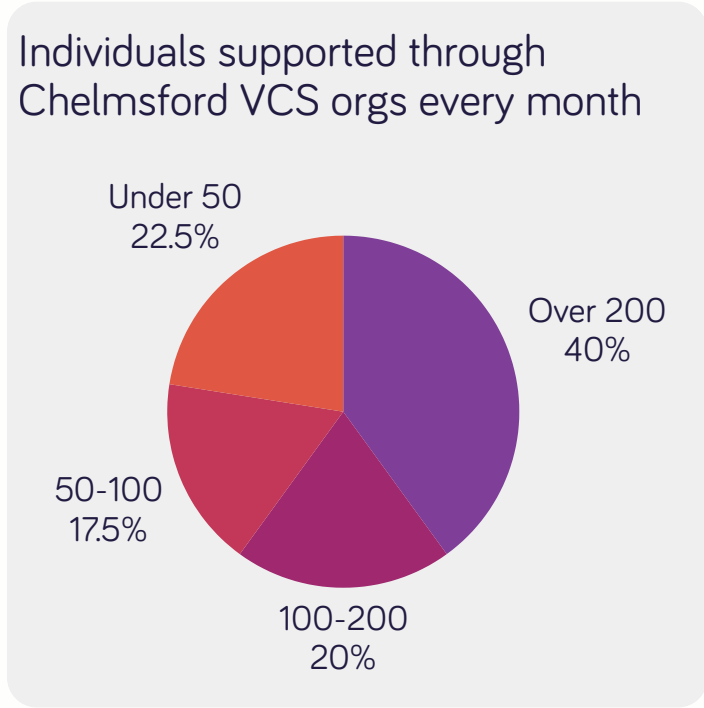
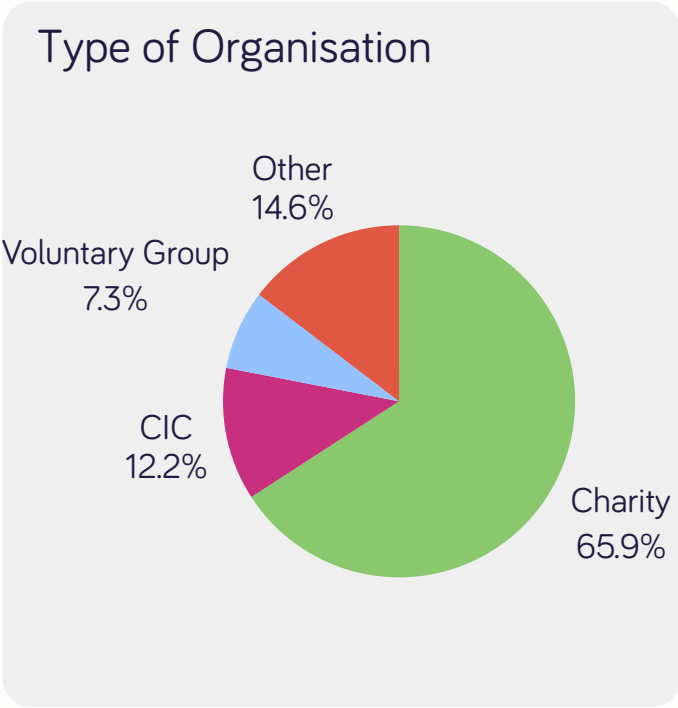
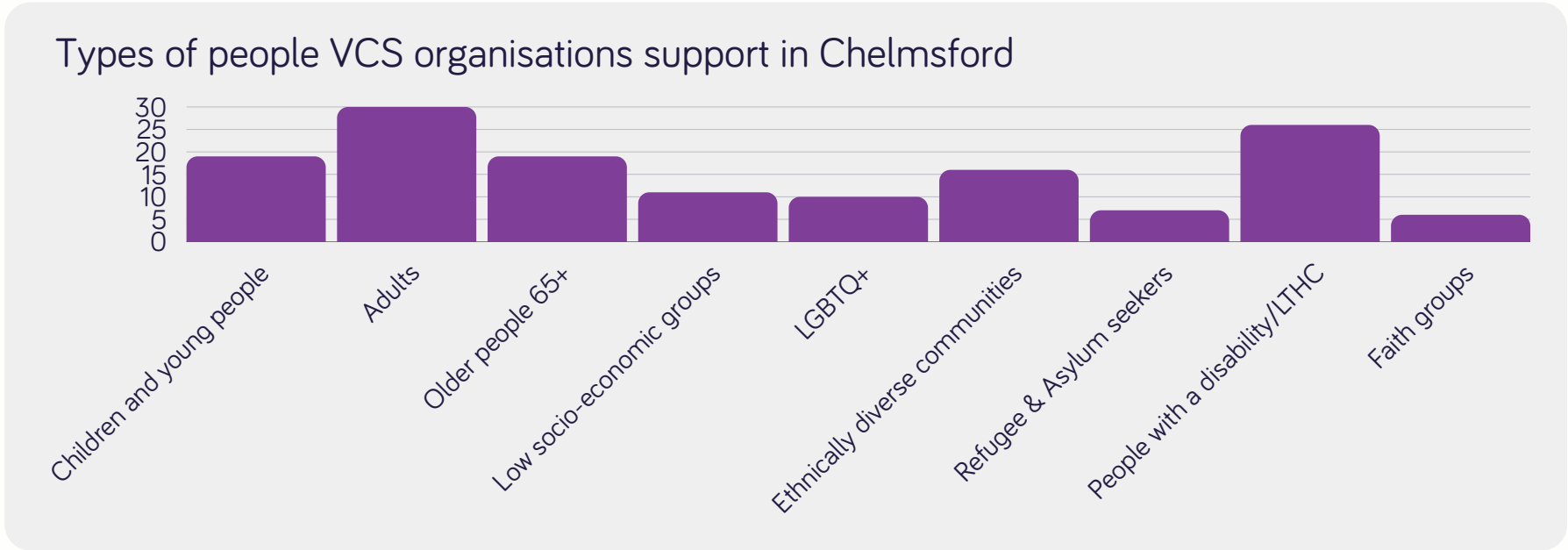
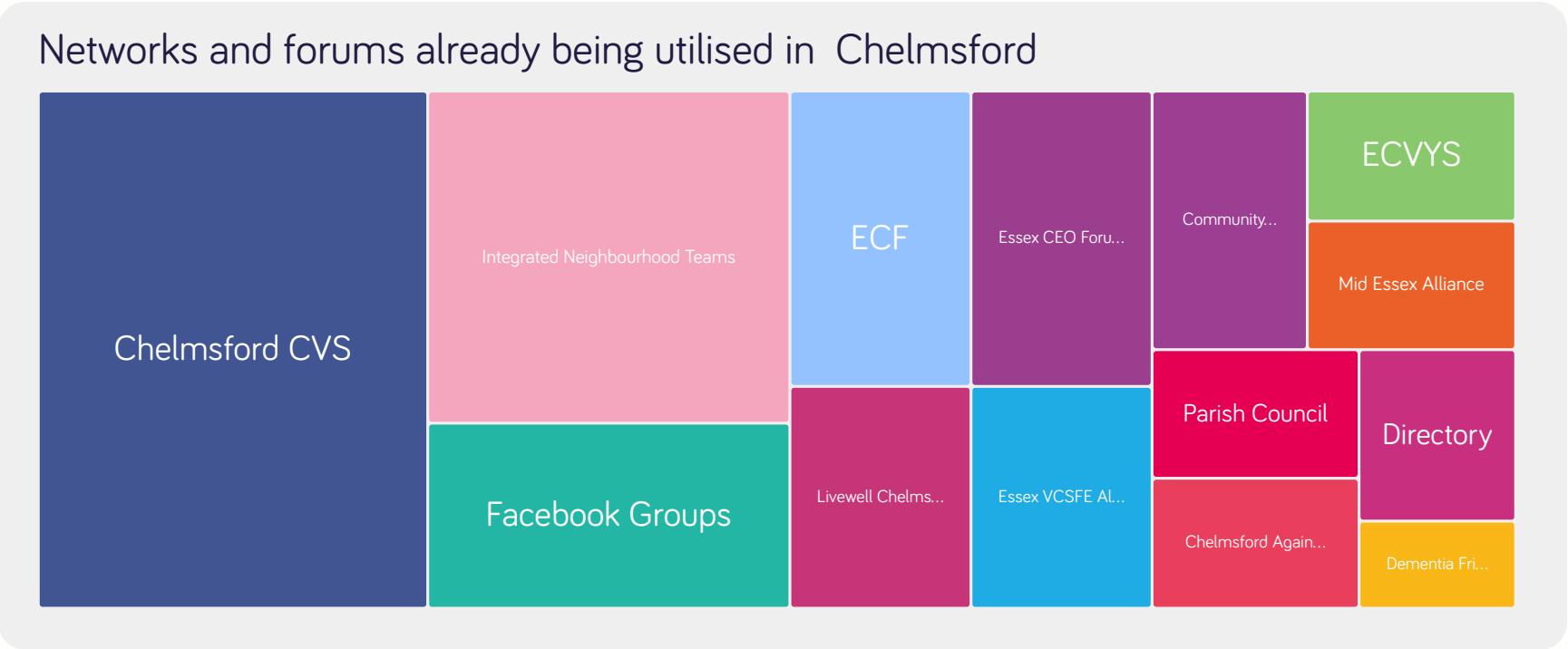
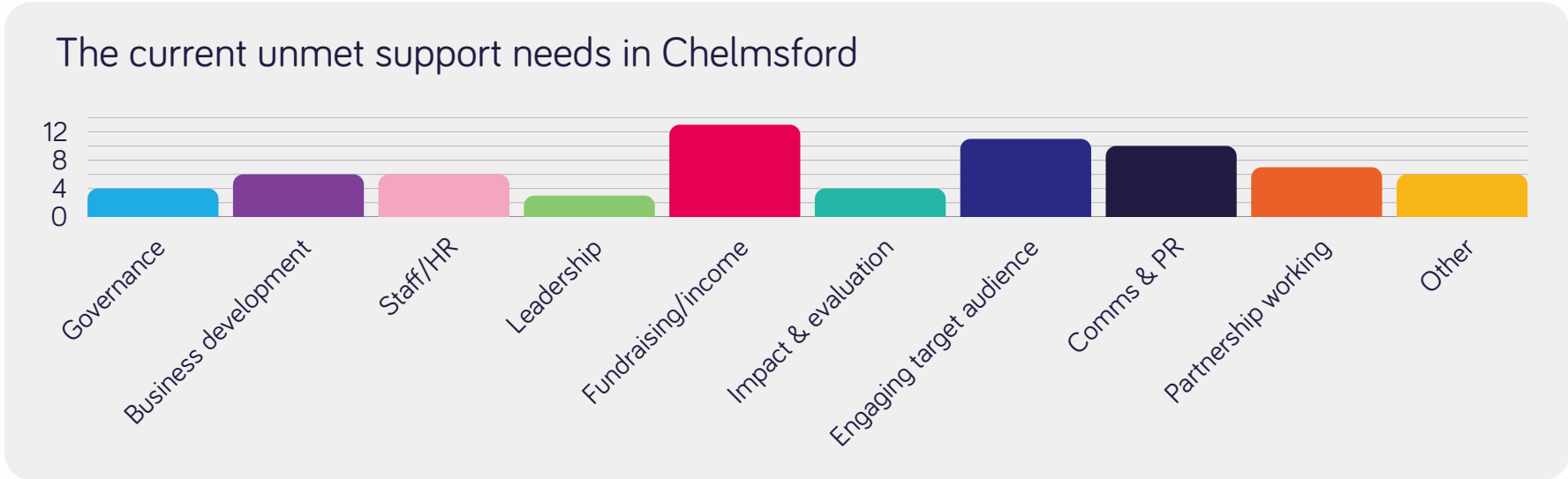
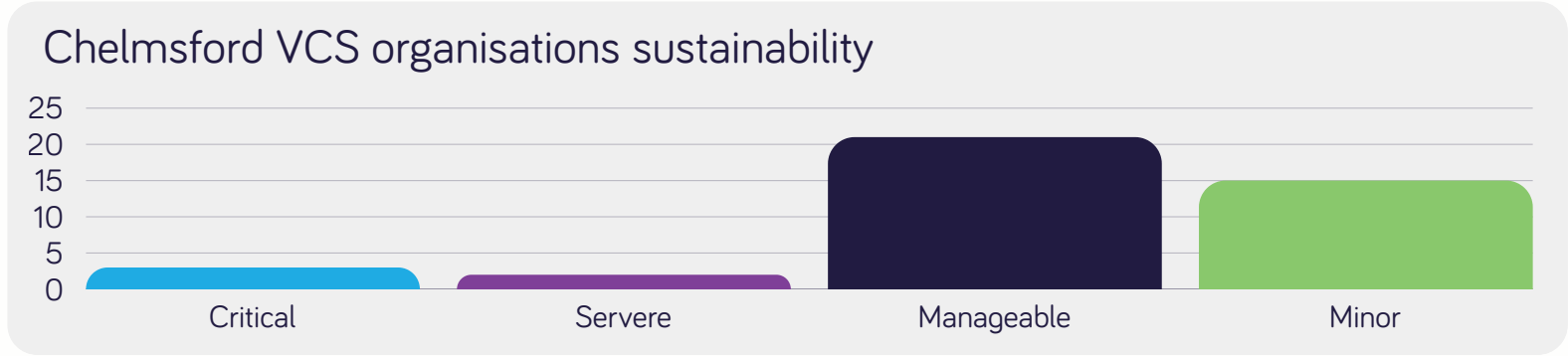




This information is from 41 organisations who completed VCS Insight Survey as of 22.06.2025





This place plan, is based off of **41** VCS organisations completing the survey.
 and **2** roundtable events hosted by Chelmsford CVS engaging
32 Individuals representing over **25** VCSOs

Fundraising and income generation is the most common unmet support need, followed by **engaging target audience** and **Comms & PR**

Training opportunities to include:

- Bid writing skills (small, large and partnership grants)
- Fundraising skills and delivering effective campaigns
- Developing effective communications and publicity
- Asset-based-community-development
- Volunteer recruitment and retention
- Access to countywide training and development opportunities

Networks to include:

- Informal Networking opportunities to connect VCS orgs
- Creation of a skills sharing platform/directory
- Supporting existing trusted networks to expand reach

Bespoke AE support to include:

- 121 with Active Essex to discuss local needs unmet through E-Portal
- matchmaking and brokering support among local organisations

Community Participation:

This would need to be explored further with local partners as didn't showcase as a high priority for Chelmsford.

What does the survey not tell us? What does their response tell us beneath the surface?

Chelmsford is a rapidly growing city that has a focus on increasing connectivity by becoming a culturally ambitious place that aids equal opportunities for the population.

Responses showed there are a variety of thriving forums that VCSOs value such as Chelmsford CVS networks and INTs appreciating the opportunities that these bring. However, VCSO's also welcomed the opportunity for more informal networking to aid peer support and skill sharing.

Funding remains an ongoing challenge for Chelmsford VCSO's, in particular longer term funding commitments and core funding are highlighted as being integral to ensuring VCSO's can be sustainable and provide vital support. VCSOs would benefit from understanding diversification and creating sustained income streams.

Although business support didn't come out as the higher priority on supporting unmet needs. It's clear from insight and responses that VCSO's do need help in regards to core business support regarding either forward planning and staff/volunteer recruitment and retention.





What else have we found/heard?

What support would you value right now and in the future?

Regular Training and Networking

Affordable training options and regular opportunities for networking and connection. Including examples such as: bid writing, marketing, AI training. Alongside the in-person opportunities for informal networking such as: sharing and learning forums.

Collaboration

Informal networking opportunities to connect on similar challenges but to also look at skill-sharing among organisations.

Operational and Workforce support

Peer support forums where operational challenges can be discussed and support on measuring and showing the impact of an organisation. Volunteer retention support and how organisations can utilise cross-volunteering.

Funding and Resources

Build relationships and partnerships with Commissioners/funders to understand opportunities. Guidance on the 'what next' when receiving funding. Accessing other organisations affordable resources. e.g. Technology support.

Insight gained from

2 Roundtables hosted by Chelmsford CVS

25 VCS organisations in attendance

32 Individuals in attendance

Have you accessed anything past or present that has been particularly useful?

Forums and support from Chelmsford CVS is valued by VCS organisations. Examples via the CVS such as trustee support, peer networks, equipment hire, newsletters and sector information. Additional organisations that have provided support include ECVYS, YMCA Essex Community Foundation examples include funding access, networking opportunities and operational guidance. Additionally lots of online forums and support was highlighted like the Small CEO Charity Facebook group, NVCO, Charity Excellence Framework and ACAS for free employment advice.

Funding

01



Many of the VCS organisations struggle with securing funding, particularly for core operational costs. While project-based funding is more readily available, it often leaves essential day-to-day expenses, unsupported. This creates financial instability and forces organisations into a continuous cycle of searching for new funding sources to stay afloat. Long-term sustainability remains a pressing concern, as reliance on short-term grants makes strategic planning difficult. Those who are a larger VCS organisation face the challenge of competition for tenders/larger funding bids to remain sustainable.

Capacity and Demand

02



VCS organisations are experiencing a demand for certain services with an increase in complex cases due to cuts or gaps in statutory services. This has led to a limited capacity to manage projects provide outreach. Witnessing staff and volunteer burnout as a result of this limited capacity.

Top challenges:

03



Leadership and Skills Development

Staff inductions/support and retaining volunteers remains a critical issue. Many organisations rely heavily on volunteer support to deliver services, but finding individuals with the right skills and availability can be challenging. There is also a recognition in how different roles within a VCS have unique challenges from the CEO's to Trustees and that Peer support would be valued. VCS organisations recognised the rich skills they have that could be shared with others but lack time/capacity to do this. Therefore, recognising the need to have easy-to-access information, support and peer networks.

04



Promotion and engagement

More VCS want to find new ways to connect with their target audiences and recognised that there is little support for PR, social media management and marketing. There was a recognition that to remain sustainable there needs to be support to help with promotion through networks and more awareness raising for individual charities and their causes.



What's the plan going forward?

Urgent things we must do

- **Informal networking opportunities need to be established to build connection and sharing amongst the VCS sector in Chelmsford.**
- **Updating E-portal with existing support mechanisms within Chelmsford (forums/resources)**

Networking and Peer Support

- Establish regular informal networking events to facilitate collaboration and partnership working.
- Develop a skills-sharing opportunities for organisations to exchange expertise.
- Promote dedicated Chelmsford peer support groups for leadership roles (Chelmsford CVS CEO forum, Trustee forum, Volunteer Managers forum).

Promotion, Awareness Raising and Engagement

Identification of local newsletter and networks for further promotion of VCSOs support they offer

- Utilising the existing newsletter provided by Chelmsford CVS.
- Utilising public facing directories such as Chelmsford For You and Sector-specific directories such as Frontline, Chelmsford Connects.
- landing resource page for Chelmsford VCSOs to access, promoting IT support, Room space, Supplies etc.

Develop a marketing and communications support offer:

- Run workshops on effective PR, social media management, and building communication strategies.
- additional training may include designing assets and AI training.

Deliver ABCD Course to support VCOs engagement with communities.

Understand further what 'evaluation and demonstrating impact' support VCSOs need.

Fundraising and Operational Support

- Provide training on writing grant applications and fundraising strategies for smaller Charities and Voluntary organisations
- Develop resources and support for diversifying income streams (e.g., corporate sponsorships).
- Support 'Meet the Funder' events to encourage connection to grant makers.
- Advocate for longer-term funding solutions for the sector especially where demand for service is increasing

Operational Support:

- Signposting to trusted sources for governance information, best practice policies and procedures.
- Support Inclusive training opportunities (EDI, MH training)

Volunteer/Staff Recruitment & Retention

- Promote cross-volunteering opportunities to help organisations share and access volunteer support.
- Provide support for Volunteer Management burnout

Universal Offer

- Signpost to county offer which will include 'creating the conditions' series and lunch and learn sessions which will pick up specific topics which have been requested across the county.
- Provide a first point of contact through Your Essex Community e-portal
- Identify bespoke support and signposting via The 6 S model ensuring support offered is at the right level for organisations
- Run a scored application process to identify local place partners delivering part of the place plan
- Provide insight and support needs to Your Community Essex elements and grow the E-Portal
- Continue to gain insight, listen and adapt place plans accordingly