



Business Plan

May 2021 – April 2024

Community Action Northumberland

UNIUN Enterprise Building, Front Street, Pegswood, Morpeth, Northumberland, NE61 6UF

<http://ca-north.org.uk/>

Introduction

This business plan covers the 3-year period to April 2024. It is a tool:

- Within our organisation, to enable our Board and staff to remain focused on our purpose and to provide the context for developing CAN's annual action plan which sets out in detail proposed activities and intended outcomes.
- For the benefit of our beneficiaries and partners, to communicate and clarify our purpose and priorities for the years ahead.

The business plan is reviewed annually, always looking ahead 3 years, in accordance with our performance management system.

Our Vision, Mission and Values were reviewed in March 2020 and are set out below.

Our Vision

Rural communities in Northumberland will be vibrant, inclusive and sustainable.

Our Mission

Our mission is to benefit and help sustain rural communities in Northumberland by:

- Promoting Rural Issues – Providing and supporting a 'rural voice' to influence policy, programmes and action.
- Empowering Communities – Supporting and developing local communities, their key groups and organisations.
- Delivering solutions – Identifying, developing and managing projects to address the needs of individuals.
- Addressing climate change – delivering projects and influencing behaviours to help meet climate action requirements.

Our Values

CAN's core values are based on:

- A consistent and absolute commitment to rural communities.
- Enabling rural communities to shape their own future.
- Being flexible and responsive to change.
- Continually learning as an organisation and delivering exemplar activities.
- An inclusive approach across all Northumberland's rural residents.
- Working with integrity, openness and a genuine passion to help Northumberland's rural communities thrive.

Operating Environment

The covid-19 pandemic has had an unprecedented impact on all areas of life, on all communities and on all organisations regardless of sector. Many lives have tragically been lost. The physical, mental, social, financial and economic impacts of the pandemic will be felt for a long time to come.

During the Pandemic, CAN has been determined to maintain our services and support for Northumberland's rural communities. Actions have included:

- Maintenance of our full staffing complement – as a small charity, our staff are our key resource. Without them we cannot deliver anything. One of our first decisions was not to take the option to furlough any staff. Whilst this would have assisted CAN's financial position by reducing direct costs, it would have led to a reduction in services at the very time when they are needed the most.
- Reviewing our financial position – we analysed all our projected income and contacted our main funders. Many activities were subsequently either delayed or extended over a longer timeframe to take account of the restrictions in place. The resulting financial gap was filled by accessing emergency and new funding streams, often reflecting new activities delivered in direct response to the issues caused by the pandemic.
- Remote working – our office was closed, along with the delivery points for specific services including our Rural Employment Hubs and Warm Hubs when required by government restrictions. All staff worked remotely from home using laptops and other equipment already supplied. The office base was maintained for occasional individual use when necessary and as a mail and large-scale printing location.
- Risk assessment – CAN's board reviewed and updated our Risk Assessment based on the impact of the pandemic and potential recurring events in the future.
- Maintaining and adapting our services – CAN's staff have worked incredibly hard to adjust our services to deliver remotely wherever possible including via online, telephone and video communications. This has enabled all our services to continue and allowed support for new approaches and initiatives. For example, we have supported many of our Warm Hubs to deliver local support during the crisis, communicated with our Employment Hub clients through group and individual sessions and a new fortnightly newsletter, supported Northumberland's village halls to close and re-open as allowed as well as assisted over 120 Halls to access the government grant support delivered through Northumberland County Council.
- Developing new services – the pandemic has thrown a number of community needs into sharp focus but also demonstrated a range of opportunities to do things differently in the future. The growth and adaptation of volunteers has been exceptional, many more people have begun to embrace the potential of online services and levels of commuting have dropped considerably. This is all balanced by the increased loneliness and isolation felt by many, loss of employment, the increased marginalisation of those unable to engage with the digital world and uncertainty about the future. Within this context, CAN

has developed new solutions and activities which will act as a springboard to work during the period of this Business Plan.

CAN's resilience, adaptability and sustainability have been demonstrable throughout the pandemic. During these turbulent times, CAN has expanded rather than contracted. This represents a significant strength which will be built upon.

In addition to the pandemic, other issues also continue to dominate the operating environment.

In particular, the climate emergency is brought into sharper focus each year. Following a review in January 2020, CAN's Board added climate action as a key element to its mission. This will increasingly frame policy and funding frameworks in the future.

Competition for grants, contracts and funding is expected to increase still further in the coming years as the UK deals with the consequences of the pandemic and its financial impact in addition to the changes brought about by Brexit.

Within this ever-changing and challenging operating environment, a number of core strengths enable CAN to stand out from the crowd:

- We are part of a unique national network of 38 local charities committed to supporting rural communities across the whole of England – the ACRE Network (Action with Communities in Rural England). This provides a significant opportunity for CAN, as a local organisation, to make an impact at national level, work collaboratively at different geographic levels and to secure funds from national sources for delivery in Northumberland.
- We have an ongoing financial relationship with the Government, along with all 38 ACRE Network members in England. Core grant from Defra has been retained in recognition of the critical services we provide to rural communities.
- CAN's financial relationship with the Northumberland Association of Local Councils (NALC) is robust and encapsulated within a three-year Memorandum of Understanding. This relationship is critical, bringing significant benefits to both organisations and ensuring real benefits for communities across the county and delivering a highly valued service across Northumberland and Newcastle.
- We have a diverse range of income sources meaning that we are not dependent on any one source. Income from contracts, direct service provision, consultancy, projects and grant has covered our costs over the last six-year period and enabled an expansion in our staff capacity. Despite the pandemic, as we start the 2021/22 year, we are adding a new post to the team reflecting our robust financial position and the strength of our relationship with local and regional partners. This is an excellent achievement enabling CAN to plan for the future from strong foundations.



- Village halls and community buildings have always been at the heart of CAN. We have strong links with the two Consortia in the west and north of the County that represent a network of over 120 village halls and community buildings. The new Northumberland Village Halls Portal and our Digital review of Village Halls represent tremendous utilisation of covid response funding that will have benefits for years to come. Our partnership with the National Lottery Community Fund, now in its third year, is especially strong and our service has grown in recent years reaching all corners of Northumberland.
- We have developed a range of hugely successful initiatives, based on our core values, which provide robust platforms for future development. For example: our Warm Hubs are thriving and provide the base from which to reach out further; our Rural Employment Hubs are desperately needed by the many people out of work; Communities CAN is now the recognised hub for community-led housing support across the North East; our village hall partnership with the National Lottery is the first of its kind in the country and helps to formally recognise the huge significance of these facilities to their communities.
- We are engaged in a wide range of activities related to positive climate action at both community and strategic levels which provide a firm platform to grow our climate and energy work, supporting local communities to play their part in climate action.
- Our relationship with Northumberland County Council and other strategic organisations has developed significantly over recent years through direct contract, day-to-day dialogue and project development. A strong and positive relationship with the Council and other key organisations is essential to our continued success.
- The North of Tyne Combined Authority and the Borderlands inclusive growth deal provide potential opportunities for CAN given the strong synergy between the rural aspirations of these deals and our extensive and respected expertise with respect to rural communities, rural needs and solutions.
- We have developed strong relationships with both the National Innovation Centre for Rural Enterprise, led by Newcastle University, and the Rural Design Centre, led by the Super Innovation Network, enabling CAN to directly support both initiatives in bringing real benefit to communities and businesses in rural Northumberland.



Rural Needs in Northumberland

“Severe isolation, ever declining access to services, an increasingly top-heavy age profile, significant low pay and limited employment opportunities present massive issues for many people living in rural Northumberland. The superficial gloss of affluence masks the reality of rural life for significant numbers of people in need.” **CAN Business Plan, March 2016**

CAN has an ongoing desire to clearly understand and highlight the needs which exist in rural Northumberland. This is both to act as a focus for our own work but also, critically, to influence funders and policymakers who often do not see beneath the apparent superficial gloss of prosperity which is perceived in most rural areas.

The excellent strategic and analysis work of organisations such as Northumberland County Council, the Community Foundation and our national partners, contribute significantly to understanding rural needs. We seek to build on this through our own work, events and by capturing the experiences of local organisations and individuals on the ground.

For example, our 2016 Annual Rural Conference identified key areas of rural need including:

- Hidden and dispersed poverty
- Lack of affordable housing
- Low pay and poverty in work
- Lack of transport, childcare, and other services
- Broadband and mobile signal infrastructure
- Out-migration of young people
- The impacts of an ageing population
- Lower take-up of benefits
- Detachment from labour markets
- Isolation and loneliness
- Lack of a ‘voice’ for young people
- Attitudes and perceptions – belief in ‘rural idyll’ prevents recognition of others’ disadvantage

Our 2017 conference delved more into the issues surrounding transport, in 2018 we looked in detail at health issues and solutions and in 2019 at how to accommodate an increasingly ageing population in a rural area such as Northumberland. Our ongoing work has identified specific needs including:

- The extent of fuel poverty through our energy work
- The needs of unemployed people through our Rural Employment Hubs
- Local housing needs through community-based Housing Needs Surveys

The covid-19 pandemic has inevitably placed additional strains on people, communities and businesses, increasing rural needs in many ways. From steep rises in unemployment and poverty to higher levels of loneliness and mental health issues, need has never been more evident.

The challenge laid down for CAN is to work to address the needs which exist. This must be achieved in partnership with other organisations and with communities to ensure that the most appropriate solutions are put in place.

Principal Areas of Work

1. Promoting Rural Issues – Providing and supporting a ‘rural voice’ to influence policy, programmes and action

We achieve an effective rural voice through a number of mechanisms including:

Defra & ACRE

CAN is funded by Defra to help address the most prevalent issues affecting the sustainability of rural communities. These are set out by Defra as follows:

- Digital infrastructure, skills and inclusion
- Rural life opportunities: (childcare, education, health, skills, loneliness and wellbeing)
- Social infrastructure (including village halls & community buildings)
- Housing and planning
- Business support and social enterprise development
- Rural transport
- Affordable energy

CAN reports directly to Defra on our performance across these areas. Through ACRE, we provide direct responses to requests for information on specific issues and to relevant national consultations enabling a collective rural voice to be presented for rural England.

Voluntary & Community Sector

CAN is a member of VONNE (Voluntary Organisations Network North East) and actively participates in a range of activities. This includes regular joint meetings with funders and other voluntary sector organisations to influence funding programmes. CAN is also an active partner in the ‘VONNE Climate Action Alliance’ which is seeking to develop a collective and enabling approach to climate action across communities and strategic partners.

Local & Combined Authorities

Through our local networks and links with other organisations at a variety of levels, we seek to gather intelligence and understand local issues. We maintain good relationships with Northumberland County Council as a critical conduit of information to influence policy and programmes. We also seek to work with the North of Tyne Combined Authority as appropriate establishing direct links on key service areas including housing and community hubs.

Good practice sharing

Demonstrating what works well is a powerful way to influence others and to enhance the rural voice. We utilise a number of mechanisms both to share our own good practice but also to learn from others. Principle routes include ACRE, where active sharing across all 38 members of the ACRE Network is facilitated by regular virtual meetings, physical meetings and ACRE facilitated work, and the Rural Services Network.

Marketing

CAN utilises a professional marketing consultant to ensure that our work is fully promoted, maximising the impact of what we do. This includes through our website, social media, press releases and our series of regular newsletters including CAN e-news, our Employment Hubs newsletter and CosyCAN targeted at Warm Hub users.

2. Empowering Communities – Supporting and developing local communities, their key groups and organisations

This includes:

- **Parish and Town Councils.** Our direct partnership with the Northumberland Association of Local Councils (NALC) is hugely valued and fundamental to the way we work. We will provide a holistic service to Parish and Town Councils including advice, training and a wide range of support throughout the year. This will include continued maintenance of the web portal for local councils and effective communication through media such as the weekly NALC e-news. It will also include ongoing support and advice with respect to the covid-19 pandemic and its aftermath. We will seek to renew our Memorandum of Understanding with NALC at least every 3 years.
- **Village halls and community buildings.** We have been supporting village halls and community buildings since we were formed in 1951. Around 250 community buildings exist across Northumberland offering vital facilities for community activities. Throughout the year we will support management committees in one-to-one case work, good practice resources, Hallmark quality assessments (24 halls currently hold Hallmark status), training, funding bids, capital and other projects as appropriate and within available capacity. We will continue to work closely with Northumberland's two village hall consortia in the North and West of the county, building on the agreement put in place with the West consortium in 2017. We will continue to explore additional funding mechanisms to enable us to maintain our essential community buildings service into the future and we will promote the importance of village halls through opportunities such as #VillageHallsWeek. We will implement strategic projects, including the Northumberland Village Halls Heritage Project (funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund), and support the Newcastle Diocese in their 'Rural Churches for Everyone' project. Both these projects have been delayed and the timeframes subsequently extended due to the impact of the covid-19 lockdown.

We will maintain our excellent relationship with the National Lottery Community Fund, implementing our £1 million partnership initiative.

We will launch and maintain the new Northumberland Village Halls Portal as an online access point for individuals and strategic service providers to the wealth of local venues across the rural county. We will work with partners, including Newcastle University, to support village halls to act on the findings of our Digital

Village Halls Review and we will promote alternative heat and power options and reduced energy bills for village halls.

- **Community-led development.** Community-led development, especially through a long-established network of Development Trusts, is a success story in Northumberland. We will seek to continue close working with Development Trusts on specific activities including the provision of project officer services at Haltwhistle Partnership and development officer services at Prudhoe Community Partnership.

This support provides these local trusts with a number of benefits including:

- direct access to an experienced officer in a well-networked and respected local organisation
- no risks associated with direct employment
- full direction of the officer by the respective board to ensure delivery of objectives
- management of the officer and full administrative back up from the CAN team
- the opportunity to benefit from participation in collaborative projects initiated through CAN's networks

We will seek to continue to take an active role in the North East Community-led Development Network which brings together interested organisations and individuals across the region. We will continue our provision of the secretariat to the network, utilising funds secured from Power to Change.

3. Delivering solutions – Identifying, developing and managing projects to address the needs of individuals

The challenges for public and voluntary bodies and businesses to provide and sustain effective, good-quality services have always been a familiar feature of rural life. This has been brought into still sharper focus by the covid-19 pandemic and its impacts. In Britain's predominantly urban society, and in a time of continuing economic restraint, new solutions are often needed specifically to meet the needs and circumstances of rural communities. Throughout our 70-year history, we have promoted and/or directly run a large number of rurally focused solutions. Subject to opportunity and available resource, we intend to develop and operate a range of initiatives, in close partnership with other bodies. Current and planned initiatives include:

- **Warm Hubs.** This project, piloted by CAN in 2015, has been rolled out to support people living across rural Northumberland and has been hugely successful. The project continues to be supported by Northern Gas Networks, winning 'Community Initiative of the Year' at the 2017

Utility Week awards and being visited by representatives of Ofgem twice in 2019. Warm Hubs are places within the local community where people can be assured of finding a safe, warm and friendly environment in which to enjoy refreshments, social activity, information, advice and the company of other people. Each venue that joins the scheme is asked to undergo an assessment to ensure that the service they offer



meets a minimum standard. Reaching this standard entitles them to call themselves a 'Warm Hub' and to use the Warm Hub logo which has been trademarked by CAN. Over 20 Warm Hubs exist in Northumberland together with a number of other venues which host 'Pop-up Warm Hubs' as an extension to the project into other locations.

During the pandemic, Warm Hubs have often become the focus for distribution of meals, grow your own packs, kitchen aid devices and much more. CAN has facilitated a 'Rural Food Kitchen' project to harness the potential of Warm Hubs, running a pilot programme towards the end of 2020/21. We will develop this project further during this Business Plan period.

Priorities during this Business Plan also include supporting the ongoing management and development of Warm Hubs and also seeking to develop a Warm Hub Portal as an online resource for all Warm Hubs and for those unable to access other facilities. We will continue to integrate the Warm Hubs initiative with other activities as funds allow, reflecting the value of the initiative in relation to a wide range of issues including isolation, health and fuel poverty.

- **Rural Employment Hubs.** Building on the success of our Rural Employment Hubs over several years, we successfully joined the countywide Bridge Project in 2018. In 2020, the Bridge Project was reformatted with individual staff TUPE transferred to each partner as appropriate. Two of the existing Bridge Workers were transferred to CAN in March 2020.

The project delivers support to unemployed people across the county and CAN's role is to ensure this reaches into the rural areas of Northumberland. We deliver the service at Alnwick, Amble, Haltwhistle, Hexham and Prudhoe as well as operating a 'pop-up hub' at other locations when need arises. All services moved online and via the telephone during the covid-19 lockdown as venues were forced to close. We will continue to deliver and further develop our Rural Employment Hubs service via online, telephone and video communications providing direct support to those out of work or on low pay. The service has been needed more than ever as unemployment has risen. We will seek to re-open the physical hubs when possible within government guidelines providing a weekly drop-in facility and/or bookable one-to-one appointments as appropriate. We will seek to identify future funding beyond the current December 2021 project end date. We will also seek further funding to enable the Hubs to continue to provide services and support beyond those allowed through the Bridge Project to ensure we are maximising the support available to the rural unemployed.

- **Community-led housing.** Utilising funds made available by Northumberland County Council from its allocation of the government's Community Housing Fund, CAN established a community-led housing hub

– 'Communities CAN (North East) Ltd.' The hub aims to ensure that the support



required by individual communities is available and to identify and implement specific opportunities. The hub acts as a focus for efforts across Northumberland and, utilising additional funding secured from the national Enabling Hubs Grant Programme, extended to the whole North of Tyne area in 2019, ensuring the right support is available to those communities looking to take forward specific community-led housing initiatives. On 1 April 2021, Communities CAN will expand its geographic remit to cover the whole of the North East by merging activities with 'Community Homes on the Map,' the hub for the South of Tyne area. A pipeline of schemes is in place with initial capital projects completed in a number of locations including Haltwhistle, Embleton and Wooler.

The 2021-24 period is a critical time for Communities CAN. We will:

- Carry out all planned activities required by the funding secured through the national 'Enabling Hub' grant programme
 - As part of the sustainability strategy for Communities CAN, seek to ensure projects take place in all parts of the North East (excluding Tees Valley)
 - Apply for Registered Provider status for Communities CAN so that we can act as a deliverer of community-led affordable homes where this is the preferred route of the local community
 - Work closely with Northumberland County Council, through their Community-led Housing team, in continuing to refine our approach
 - Support local organisations at all stages of development to deliver local affordable housing
 - Seek direct involvement in schemes, where appropriate, in order to generate income
 - Review the governance of Communities CAN to ensure it fits the wider geographic responsibility and the requirements of the Registration process
 - Seek to implement the revised Communities CAN Business Plan, particularly with respect to the development of funding and income streams.
- **Health and wellbeing initiatives.** CAN has developed a number of projects in recent years targeting health and wellbeing issues. Often generated through our Warm Hubs and Rural Employment Hubs, initiatives have included:
 - A slow cooking revolution, educating Warm Hub and Employment Hub participants in healthy, energy-efficient eating. This project has distributed over 100 slow cookers to local residents.
 - A 'Grow your own' initiative, implemented during the covid-19 lockdown and directly targeting the mental health issues evident in many old and young people alike. This project distributed plants, seeds, compost, plant trays and associated items to enable people to grow their own fruit and vegetables assisting with healthy eating but also directly supporting individual wellbeing.



- Acting as a local host for Northumberland Public Health's 'Empowering Communities' programme.

We will continue to engage with strategic health organisations in Northumberland to explore opportunities to integrate our existing work with health activities where appropriate. We will seek funding opportunities to extend, enhance and develop these services including through social prescribing, village agent and other mechanisms.

Local voluntary groups have been actively distributing food to vulnerable people throughout the covid-19 crisis. Built around volunteers from Warm Hubs and Northumberland's village halls, CAN has been supporting these groups through provision of essential equipment, training and direct links with food banks and strategic services. Our 'slow cooking' project has supported low-cost healthy eating by providing equipment, recipes and ideas for what to make from delivered food parcels. The need for our 'Grow your own' has been clearly demonstrated and we will seek to expand this initiative building on our 'Rural Food Kitchen' pilot project run towards the end of 2020/21. This aims to include the potential utilisation of surplus food from community gardens, allotments, private gardens and community orchards supporting isolated households in eating healthily through cooking themselves and delivery of prepared meals together with the expansion of our slow cooking programme online and a range of related activities.

- ***Rural enterprise and innovation.***

In 2019 we supported proposals from Newcastle University to develop a 'National Innovation Centre for Rural Enterprise' (NICRE) with planned funding from Research England. We were also involved in discussion around a parallel 'Rural Design Centre' proposal.

The NICRE initiative has successfully attracted funding and commenced operations towards the end of 2020. CAN is acting as a partner with NICRE, assisting to develop and deliver elements of this exciting project, utilising our expertise and networks to maximise the benefits for rural Northumberland and develop innovative solutions to entrenched rural issues.

We have also developed a close relationship with the Rural Design Centre, led by the Super Innovation Network and funded through the North of Tyne Combined Authority and ERDF. We have jointly developed a proposal to undertake feasibility into alternative energy solutions for rural communities and their community buildings and are also working to develop activities in specific communities.

Both NICRE and the Rural Design Centre present tremendous opportunities to help find sustainable solutions to key rural issues and CAN will seek to make the most of these opportunities for rural Northumberland. We will maintain our close relationship with both programmes and work alongside NICRE and the Rural Design Centre to help frame their activities and maximise their positive impact.

In partnership with the North East Enterprise Agency Ltd (NEEAL), in recent years we have endeavoured to support the Rural Connect network which brings together over 30 rural enterprise hubs across the region. We will seek ways to make best use of this network in support of NICRE activities.

- **Community Fund management.** We will continue to facilitate and support the community benefits fund attached to the Wingates windfarm and will offer similar services to other commercial organisations looking to establish and run community funds.
- **Rural Community Support and consultancy.** We will provide additional support for rural community organisations through our website, newsletters, responding to email and phone queries and staging events where possible. We are keen to support community groups in devising and delivering solutions to key rural issues such as affordable housing, broadband, energy and services where funding can be identified. Our expertise includes project development and delivery, financing, constitutional and organisational development, compliance, resolving conflicts, confidence-building, interpretation and community engagement. In addition, we carry out specific consultancy projects including community and parish surveys.

4. Addressing climate change – delivering projects and influencing behaviours to help meet climate action requirements.

CAN will seek to maintain current activities aimed at addressing fuel poverty, reducing fuel bills and addressing the urgent need to take climate action including:

- Delivering information and advice through our network of Warm Hubs and the volunteers involved in each hub on energy efficiency, alternative energy sources, using slow cookers as a mechanism to reduce energy usage and bills as well as promoting healthy eating, advising on warm homes discount, energy tariffs and the Priority Services Register.
- Running ‘Rural Energy Roadshows’ at various locations, as funding permits, to promote energy efficiency and explain alternative sources of energy.
- Promoting the plight of households off the electricity grid and working with key strategic partners, including Northumberland County Council and Northumberland National Park, through the Northumberland Off-grid Taskforce
- Undertaking energy audits at village halls as funding permits and assisting with the implementation of their findings
- Utilising our own infrared camera to assist specific buildings to identify their key areas of heat loss.
- Managing our ‘OilCAN’ membership scheme helping people off-gas to obtain competitive prices for heating oil, LPG and coal and also providing a ready network for the promotion of alternative, non-fossil fuel heat sources and hybrid heat pump systems.

- Managing our 'EnergyCAN' scheme helping to achieve lower electricity and gas prices for participants, including over 50 village halls.
- Produce the 'CosyCAN' newsletter each winter highlighting tips for staying warm and reducing energy bills.
- Support applications to the Rural Community Energy Fund and other sources in Northumberland, helping communities to respond to the climate action agenda.
- Remain an active partner in the VONNE Climate Action Alliance.
- Facilitating cross-community projects to harness the growing desire of local communities to take climate action and enable strategic resources to be accessed.
- We will seek to develop our proposed Warm Hub Porta' into an online resource for energy and carbon reduction information and support. Our aim is that this includes resources, training, webinars, 'how to' films and other information. We will also support Warm Hubs to become exemplars of energy efficiency and low carbon.
- We will seek funds to provide one-to-one support and to develop our network of Community Energy Agents and seek to bring direct energy advice and support to households off the electricity and/or gas grid across rural Northumberland.
- We will support village halls to explore renewable energy options through schemes such as the Rural Community Energy Fund and, when established, the Energy Framework for the Borderlands Inclusive Growth programme. We will also support rural churches in a similar vein through the Rural Churches for Everyone project.
- We will aim to support individual communities keen to address climate action through our proposed Warm Hub Portal and also through direct support where funding allows.
- As Northumberland emerges from the covid-19 lockdown, we will support efforts to enable reductions in carbon emissions to be maintained through initiatives aimed at supporting improved transport options, enhanced broadband and mobile connectivity.

Resourcing the Plan

1. Governance

The activities of CAN are overseen by a board of voluntary trustees who are responsible for the strategic management of CAN's affairs including the maintenance of a risk register, budget monitoring and policy development. The Board currently has one committee – the Finance & General Purposes Committee. Our memorandum and articles state that the board will consist of not fewer than 3 and not more than 20 trustees. As at March 2021, the Board consists of 11 people.

A trustee skills audit was carried out in 2020 as part of CAN's ongoing work to ensure the board encompasses all the necessary skills and experience required.

2. Staffing

The current (March 2021) staffing structure consists of 9 members of staff, which represents 7.5 FTE posts. The team is structured as follows:

Chief Executive (0.8 FTE)

Responsible for: performance management; input to Board; staff management; strategic partner relationships; leading on 'rural voice' work; identifying and securing income; project development, management & leadership.

NALC Chief Officer (0.5 FTE)

Leading on delivery of the Memorandum of Understanding and all associated services with NALC.

Community Initiatives Officer (1.0 FTE)

Responsible for: work with village halls/community buildings; supporting the NALC contract; project development and management; delivering training; networking; identifying and securing income.

Community Development Officers (Two posts: 1.0 and 0.8 FTE)

Responsible for: project development and management; advising VCS organisations; working on rural issues; organising events; delivering training; networking; identifying and securing income.

Finance and Administration Officers (Two posts: 0.4 and 1.0 FTE):

Responsible for: all financial matters, administration and office management for CAN and NALC.

Bridge Workers (Two posts: 1.0 FTE each)

Responsible for: delivery of the Bridge Project, supporting individual clients and all reporting.

During 2021/22 we will appoint additional fixed term staff as follows:

Development Officer (0.6 FTE)

Responsible for supporting Haltwhistle Partnership, Prudhoe Community Partnership and our innovation associate role with the National Innovation Centre for Rural Enterprise (NICRE).

Energy Advisers (Two posts; 0.6 FTE each)

Responsible for delivering energy advice and support as part of the Energy Redress project.

Communities CAN Hub Coordinator (0.6 FTE)

Responsible for managing the community-led housing hub for the North East and delivering the pipeline of schemes.

We aim to create a stable and secure working environment that enables staff to play a significant role in the organisation's development. We operate an annual appraisal system within the framework of this Plan and the annual Action Plan and staff are supported to undertake training where this supports CAN's objectives and work programme. In 2016, CAN became accredited as a 'Living Wage Employer.'

The need to increase staff capacity as a principal mechanism to enable effective succession planning was agreed following a strategy board review in January 2020. A new Development Officer role has subsequently been created, initially for a fixed term of 12 months but with firm aspirations to make this role permanent, subject to funding. We also plan to recruit a new Coordinator for the Communities CAN hub to facilitate the development of community-led housing support across the North East. This post will also initially be limited to 12 months with extension dependent on funds.

During the covid-19 crisis, all staff have successfully worked from home. In the future much more home-based work is likely to become the norm, utilising the office as and when required. We will review our Working from Home policy to reflect the experience gained.

3. Budget Overview

The budgeted expenditure for CAN in 2021/22 is £405,000. Our target is to maintain a break-even position on the budget and invest any annual surpluses in delivery.

4. Financial Strategy

Core elements of our income come from Defra and NALC with the remainder being raised from a combination of contracts, consultancy, project funded activity and donations.

Over the last 3 years we have grown our income from these sources. As part of the strategic review of CAN carried out in 2014 and 2015, it was agreed that our future financial strategy should be to develop more long-term funding arrangements. A further review carried out by the Board in January 2020 identified the need to seek additional sources of revenue funding.

The headlines of our financial strategy include:

- Ensuring we deliver appropriately on all secured funding sources.
- Securing resources to cover all items of expenditure incurred by our projects (full-cost recovery).
- Maintaining a level of unrestricted reserves which is sufficient to cover our liability for unforecast costs such as redundancy payments, sickness/maternity/paternity salary cover, relocation costs, and IT equipment. In addition, we aim to have sufficient reserves to meet up to 6 months running costs.
- Seeking donations from appreciative past beneficiaries and charitable funders.

- Giving a high priority to the timely submission of financial claims and reports in a format acceptable to funders.
- Constantly pursuing ways of minimising our costs: for example, by negotiating with suppliers, by adjusting our staffing levels and changing working practices to meet changes in our finances.
- Negotiating with key funders near the end of their financial year or programme duration, to maximise the use of their time-limited resources.
- Considering carefully 'loss-leader' work, where this will build a stronger relationship with key funders.
- Monitoring, planning and adjusting on a continual basis to allow flexibility and a response to changing circumstances.

5. Physical Resources

CAN is based within the UNIUN Enterprise Centre in Pegswood. The office space is currently adequate to accommodate the team and there are no plans to move premises soon. We aim to review our office arrangements during 2021/22.

We rent community premises in each location where our Employment Hubs operate. Training and other services will be delivered throughout Northumberland by utilisation of appropriate accommodation. CAN's website will be used to enable access to information and services and communication forums.

7. Marketing and Communications

During 2015, marketing was identified as a key weakness of CAN. This was addressed in October 2016 with the appointment of a marketing consultant, initially on an 11-month contract.

We continue to contract with a marketing consultant and have built up the time to 4 days per month (one day per week) to meet our needs. This has proved hugely beneficial in improving the quality, reach and impact of our communications. The consultant leads on the production of press releases, maintaining our website and a wide range of other media relations. The consultant also leads the production of our CAN e-news bulletins which are now produced fortnightly and on our larger CAN News which we aim to produce once or twice per annum.

Utilising a specialist marketing consultant has the double benefit of providing a professional approach to our marketing and communications and releasing the time of staff that, previously, had been involved in covering these responsibilities.

Implementation

The business plan is accompanied by an annual Action Plan, which details the activities of the staff and trustees for the year. The Action Plan will be implemented and regularly reviewed by the Chief Executive and by staff. As part of the Action Plan compilation process, the business plan will be reviewed each year and, where appropriate, revised.

Appendix: SWOT analysis

The following provides a summary of the key strengths and opportunities on which we will seek to capitalise over the next three years, as well as the weaknesses and threats we will address in order to achieve our strategic objectives.

<p>Strengths (Internal)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accumulated knowledge and wisdom • Rural credentials • Connections and relationships with rural groups • Understand local geography, who's who and who is doing what • Recognised by Defra as a key player • Part of a bigger and stronger network via ACRE and the RCC network • Specialist expertise re community buildings, local councils & other areas • Trusted by our beneficiaries • Good reputation with many partner organisations and valued by clients • Reputation for good people skills and ability to connect with dispersed groups • Facilitation and acting as an intermediary • Strong staff loyalty to CAN and team • CAN staff work flexibly and collaboratively and have good organisational knowledge • Staff and board able and willing to adapt, work flexibly and diversify into new service areas • Strong board with good connections to staff • Lean and agile organisation 	<p>Weaknesses (Internal)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial insecurity can create short-term focus, restricting ambition and forward planning • Staff resources stretched and lot of pressure on small number of staff to deliver against targets and deadlines on diversity of projects • Danger of diverting resources away from delivery to seeking future funding • Staff not always having the appropriate skills to deliver in a rapidly changing environment
<p>Opportunities (External)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build on our core, valued and proven expertise • Potential for increased strategic collaboration with key partners, building on recent successes • Expand consultancy work and training provision • Build CAN reputation through effective communication and marketing • Charging for services • Direct collaboration with other ACRE Network members • Using untapped skills among staff and volunteers • Income generation via energy and other services • NICRE and the Rural Design Centre present significant opportunities 	<p>Threats (External)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to manage staff/contract levels as success leads to increasing workload • Competitive nature of the VCS sector • Loss of revenue from current funders, inc central Govt • Insufficient end-users / funders able or willing to pay to cover full costs of services • Responding to ability to pay / funding opportunities instead of identified needs • Continual change in operating environment and not responding to this. • Change in local and central government policy • Loss of staff expertise through long term illness, retirement or resignation