

Volunteers for Health Northants Programme Strategy 2025 – 2027



FEBRUARY 2026

Vision



Creating an inclusive, volunteering system for all health volunteers in Northamptonshire.

Mission



- People contribute, develop and pursue their interests while addressing health inequalities.
- Contribute to system-wide change in health and care settings.
- To champion involvement of underrepresented communities.

Partnership



The programme is coordinated through the **Steering Group**: Voluntary Impact Northamptonshire (VIN) – Programme Lead – the Integrated Care Board (ICB), Northamptonshire Health Foundation Trust (NHFT), Mental Health Northants Collaboration (MHNC), Northamptonshire Community Foundation (NCF), Support Northants/Northants Black Communities Together (NBCT), University Hospitals Northants (UHN), St Andrew’s Healthcare (STAH), Groundwork/Aspire NN, Northamptonshire Carers, Northamptonshire Libraries, and the General Practice Alliance (GPA). (*Appx 12*)



Volunteers for Health Northants
Embedding Volunteers in Health Care





Programme Outcomes

- Volunteering is embedded into the system at a strategic level.
- Volunteer infrastructure is developed and improved.
- The diversity of the volunteer workforce will be improved.

(Appx 4)



Delivery Plan

Objective	Date	Key Partners
Develop Inclusive Volunteering Pathways	June 2026	Lead Partner, Steering Group, Delivery Partners
Harmonise Volunteering through The Volunteer Charter, Good Practice Toolkit, and the Benchmarking Framework (App 10, 11, 12)	April 2026	Lead Partner, Steering Group, Delivery Partners
Strengthen Volunteer and VCSE Organisational Development	December 2027	Delivery Partners
Develop a realistic Volunteer Passport system	June 2026	Delivery Partners
Apply relevant learning from the Test & Learn Pilot projects	July 2026 – July 2027	Steering Group, NCF (Year 1 & 2)
Evaluate the VfH Programme and integrate findings into this Strategy	July 2027	Lead Partner, External Evaluator
Integrate Volunteers for Health & Care within the new Neighbourhood areas (App 8)	March 2027	Lead Partner, Steering Group
Develop a Succession Plan for VfH beyond June 2027	December 2026	Lead Partner



Local Context

786,400 population (*App 1*), mixed urban/rural, life expectancy 81. 17–18% have limiting long-term illness; mental health, dementia, and unpaid carers notable. Deprivation concentrated in 24 neighbourhoods (*App 2*). Employment above national average, but pockets of economic disadvantage remain (*App 3*).

Staff shortages

Northamptonshire continues to face significant workforce pressures across health and social care, with **1,900 vacancies** in adult social care and high turnover—**23.4% in North Northamptonshire** alone. Recruitment challenges are most acute in **home care**, where low pay, demanding conditions and limited career pathways reduce retention, while an **84% drop in care worker visas** has further constrained the labour pool. Combined with rising demand and an ageing population, these shortages continue to limit capacity, slow hospital discharge, and undermine care quality across the system. (*App 13, 14*)



Survey & Conference Findings

VfH conference and survey (*App 5*) shaped priorities: inclusive, flexible volunteering; innovative models; integration into health and care.

Key needs: improved infrastructure (recruitment, passporting), capacity building, diversity, and responsive volunteer experience. Survey shows concentrated activity in Northampton, structured but challenged recruitment, and gaps in representation and feedback



Good Practice Volunteer Management Toolkit & Volunteer Charter

We have developed a Good Practice Volunteer Management Toolkit to support partners engaging with volunteers. This resource offers practical advice, guidance, templates, and links to useful, reliable material. The Volunteer Charter promotes consistent, high-quality volunteer management and guides organisational policies and practices.



Context with the NHS 10-year plan

SWOT Analysis - This analysis supports the development of the strategy for VfH. It reflects both the national direction set by the NHS 10-Year Plan and the realities of delivering volunteering across Northamptonshire. For more detail of how VfH Northants aligns to both ICS and 10-year plan. (App 6)



Category	National Context	VfH Northants Context
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong alignment with NHS prevention and community care plans. • National recognition of volunteering's role in 10-year plan. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Established partnerships with VCSE and NHS bodies need strengthening. • Volunteers know their communities. • New Models of Care pilot considers future VCSE participation.
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inconsistent funding and commissioning across regions. • Limited national data on impact. • Reduction of staff across the system. • Commissioning and procurement changes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reliance on short-term funding. • Volunteer recruitment and retention challenges in rural areas. • Partnerships with reduced funding. • Reduced Local Area Partnerships. • Ongoing staff shortages in Adult Social Care risks increase demand of low-funded VCSE organisation. • Volunteer recruitment challenges in rural areas.
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NHS 10-Year Plan emphasis on prevention and community-based care. • Digital tools to scale up sharing of volunteers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integration with Local Area Partnerships (LAPs.) • Potential to influence ICB strategy through co-production.
Threats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk of being deprioritised in national funding decisions. • Competition with other health initiatives and statutory agencies ICB. • Digital transformation being prioritised. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New ICB structure may centralise decision-making, in detriment to specialised local VCSE organisations with diluted voice. • Risk of losing local focus in a larger system. • Risk of further increase in digital poverty; rural areas, elderly and general population on low income.



Evaluation & Learning

The University of Northampton will support independent evaluation, with a mixed-method approach that combines qualitative and quantitative data. Peer learning through Test & Learn Pilots and delivery Partners will inform the strategy on an ongoing basis. Reports will be shared with the network and the national programme.

For More Information

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Appendices

- Appendix 1- Population and demographics
- Appendix 2 – Deprivation
- Appendix 3 – Economic Activity
- Appendix 4 – Milestones
- Appendix 5 – Survey & Conference Findings
- Appendix 6 – Alignment to ICS, NHS 10yp.
- Appendix 7 – SWOT analysis
- Appendix 8 – Aligning with Social Prescribing
- Appendix 9 – VfH Benchmark Framework
- Appendix 10 – Good Practice Toolkit
- Appendix 11 – Volunteer Charter
- Appendix 12 – Glossary of Partners
- Appendix 13 – Staff shortages in ASC
- Appendix 14 – Skills for Care report



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