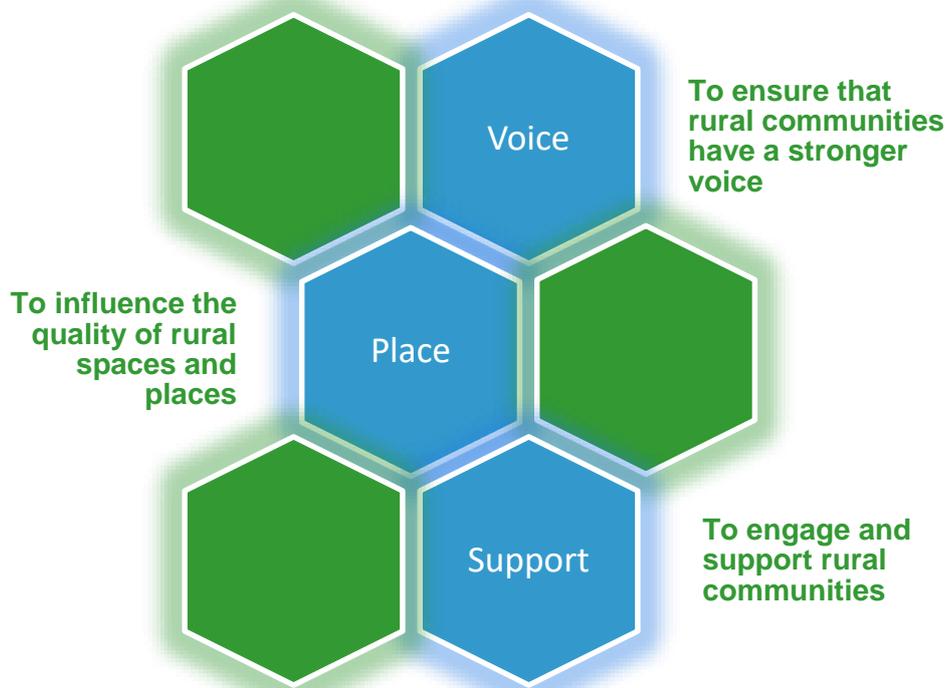


# Business Plan 2019-22

## CHESHIRE COMMUNITY ACTION

### “Supporting Our Rural Communities”



### Vision

To encourage and develop sustainable rural communities where people want to live and work

### Mission Statement

To be the leading organisation supporting the rural communities of Cheshire, Halton and Warrington by providing excellent services in a flexible and independent way

[www.cheshireaction.org.uk](http://www.cheshireaction.org.uk)

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# 1. The Document Context

## Who is this document written for?

This plan is for the Board Members and staff at Cheshire Community Action (CCA) to guide the organisation's strategic direction. It is also written to help inform external stakeholders of CCA's strategic direction including commissioners and funders as appropriate.

## Why was this plan produced?

This document sets out the strategic direction of Cheshire Community Action's work from April 2019 to March 2022.

Its purpose is to guide the Board and staff when conducting the organisation's work to ensure the organisation is:

- a) clear on its purpose and direction and;
- b) aware of its policy context, threats and opportunities to which it needs to respond.

## How should this plan be utilised?

The plan has been developed to enhance the manner in which the charity is managed and governed. It should be a guidance point for strategic and management decision-making within the charity.

## What is Contained in this Document?

The document provides a detailed description of the charity, its purpose and broad activities.

The initial sections introduce the charity: Section 1 provides an overview of the charity and its status. Section 2 illustrates the geographical areas of interest. Section 3 examines the context of the work and its environment.

Section 4 explains the aims and objectives agreed to fulfil the charity's mission. This is the central aspect of the plan and provides the structure for all activities. The final section (5) details who is involved in the charity.

The Appendix notes provide supplementary information on the structure of our staff and Board (Appendix 1).

## 1. Introducing Cheshire Community Action

Cheshire Community Action (CCA) is the operating name for Cheshire Community Council (registered name). Formed in 1930, the organisation is registered in England and Wales as a charity (Charity Commission; number 1074676) and Company Limited by Guarantee (Companies House; number 3555199).

CCA is part of the Rural Community Council (RCC) movement, which started in the years after World War I. RCCs had the primary task of regenerating rural communities by providing new village halls and a support service for the development of rural industries.

Since then the work of RCCs has expanded to include most issues that affect rural areas. CCA is a membership organisation. The membership includes local councils, community buildings/village halls and individuals.

CCA is one of 37 Rural Community Councils (RCCs) throughout England; Action for Communities in Rural England (ACRE) is their umbrella body. The RCCs operate collectively as the ACRE Network. All network members have the broad purpose of improving quality of life in rural communities.

## 2. Area of Operations

CCA's constitution ensures that we mainly work with any community that is rural or semi-rural in areas of Cheshire, Halton and Warrington. 'Rural' is our unique selling point and the context in which the organisation has most experience, skills and networks. However, we also deliver services in urban areas where our skills and competencies as an organisation are required.

Our main area of operation embraces the historical county of Cheshire, which is now divided into four local authority areas:

- Cheshire East
- Cheshire West and Chester
- Halton
- Warrington

Our services tend to be delivered within these four specific geographic areas, dependent upon the size, nature and scope of the work agreed.

In recent years, CCA has supported communities outside its normal operating area e.g. Greater Manchester and Shropshire where there have been specific gaps in service in those areas. Going forward CCA will continue to develop its 'out of region' service offer, particularly income-generating services for example: neighbourhood plan consultancy, community led housing support, social enterprise support and community development activities.

### Map of the main geographical area in which CCA operates:



## 3. The Wider Context

### Community Challenges:

All communities face challenges from one degree to another. We have captured some of the key challenges that our communities continue to face:

#### **Public sector funding and service cuts**

All communities face challenges with reductions in public sector funding, which has resulted in many public services being cut back in recent years. Rural areas in particular have historically suffered from systematic underfunding by Central Government giving them less grant per head than urban areas – despite the fact that it costs more to provide the services in rural. As a result, many rural communities in Cheshire in recent years have experienced an acceleration in the closure of many local facilities and services compounded by periodic restructuring and scaling down of public sector service providers.

#### **Accessing services**

Nearly 40% of Cheshire and Warrington's population is rural, yet 'rural' makes up four-fifths of the land area. Therefore, rural residents and businesses face multiple barriers in terms of access to key services e.g. broadband and transport. Yet councils providing services to rural residents receive less money from Government and pay disproportionately more for fewer services than people in urban areas. As a result, rural residents suffer multiple disadvantages.

#### **Increasingly unaffordable housing**

The disparity between what people earn and house prices is worst in rural areas. There is also a smaller proportion of affordable housing in the rural area compared to urban. In parts of rural Cheshire, house prices are more than 10 times what people earn and more than 50% of the local population cannot afford to buy a home on the open market. In many rural communities, provision of affordable housing under the Government's definition of 80% of market value is still out of reach for most people on low incomes - forcing people out of communities and away from their families.

#### **An ageing and increasingly isolated population**

In Cheshire, the over 85s population is forecast to double over the next 20 years and over 65s are forecast to increase by around 50%. There is a continuing trend for family units to break up with more and more households made up of singles and couples. In rural areas, this presents particular challenges due to the geographical / physical isolation as well as the digital and social isolation making rural areas more vulnerable to poorer health outcomes.

The bulk of our work tackles these challenges, and we are mindful of these issues when delivering our projects.

### Government Agenda

The agenda of the Government is to empower communities by handing over specific powers, rights *and* responsibilities to communities at the local level, whether that be the disposal of public assets or the transfer of services e.g. from a Local Authority to a Parish Council or community organisation. This has the potential to benefit our rural communities significantly, provided they have the right tools and support to engage meaningfully in these policy changes.

For support agencies like CCA this has a direct financial consequence. How Local Authorities use their budgets to support communities since 2010 has changed. Reduced resources are being allocated for such services, whilst at the same time traditional grants have moved to contracts and service level agreements. Without choosing to undertake the delivery of services, organisations such as CCA would not survive; supporting communities must now be done whilst balancing the meeting of contracts.

The key challenge for CCA from 2019 to 2022 is to improve our focus and direction in order to exploit fully the opportunities available. This includes:

- Delivery of a clear, well-defined portfolio of appropriate services
- Creating greater consistency and coherence across all marketing and communications
- Ensuring we have the right staff, properly skilled and able to deliver services to the highest quality

Successfully addressing these challenges will enable us to take advantage of the market opportunities available, in particular by continuing to increase the level of membership amongst Community Buildings and Parish Councils, by demonstrating our impact to customers and potential funders to ensure we protect and increase funded services and income, and by continuing to increase income from consultancy services, in particular through:

- Neighbourhood Planning
- Community Led Housing
- Social Enterprise Support.

## 4. Aims and Objectives

### 4.1 The Strategic Aims:

CCA has adopted a set of strategic aims to guide the Board in its decision making. These aims not only steer the organisation but also act as a guide to the governance of the charity, ensuring it is focused upon the continuous improvement of services, the long-term sustainability of the organisation and the most effective use of resources to support rural communities.

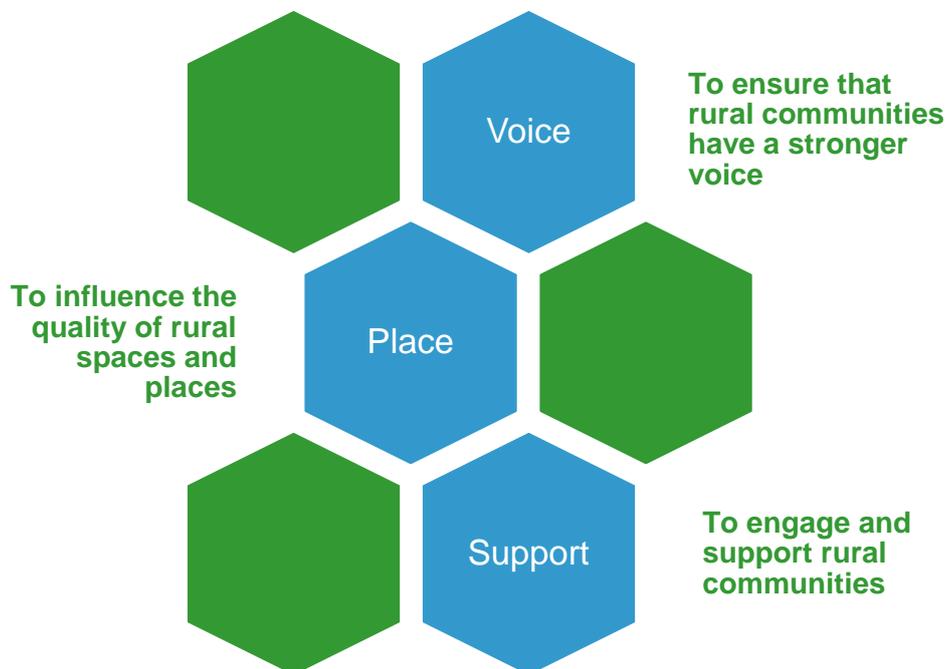
Our aims are:

- i. To provide a portfolio of quality services
- ii. To be recognised as a successful organisation by local institutions
- iii. To influence and interpret policy decision-making at local and national levels
- iv. To maintain a commercial approach to delivering our charitable objectives
- v. To build a financially resilient and stable organisation
- vi. To communicate effectively

**These strategic aims are delivered through the achievement of the following objectives.**

### 4.2 Objectives

Reflecting upon our agreed responsibilities as a member of ACRE Network, CCA's three core organisational objectives are set as follows:



Each objective is a broad theme of work that facilitates the delivery of CCA's mission. Connected to these objectives are operational priorities used to determine the projects, contracts and services we provide. These priorities are reviewed annually to update the impact of the charity's work.



- **Supporting delivery of affordable housing**  
CCA works with partners and communities to assess local housing needs and assist in the delivery of affordable housing including community-led schemes
- **Facilitate community engagement**  
CCA helps people engage with service providers to have more influence and understanding of how to make changes and improve places and services
- **Providing better access to health and social care services**  
CCA directly provides early intervention and prevention services to vulnerable adults to enable them to live more independently and reduce demand on more costly, acute services e.g. hospitals
- **Joining up health and social care services**  
CCA has a strategic role in facilitating more joined-up health and social care services between the public and third sectors
- **Supporting community buildings and assets**  
CCA helps volunteers who run community buildings to realise the potential of these assets. It also supports communities in developing a range of other physical assets including playing fields, play areas, cafes and shops.
- **Supporting neighbourhood planning**  
CCA supports the development of neighbourhood plans.
- **Tackling isolation**  
CCA supports and directly delivers in tackling social, physical and digital isolation.

## 4.3 Services

CCA is a membership organisation with two main paying-membership groups, namely Parish Councils and Community Buildings.

CCA receives restricted income to deliver specific services or projects to our rural communities, either through grants or service level contracts. In 2018/19 CCA provided services in excess of 20 separate agreements. In addition, CCA is in a position to generate unrestricted income through the delivery of commercial services around community-led planning.

In order to fulfil these products and services, our staff and volunteers perform a range of roles in order to encourage and develop sustainable rural communities where people want to live and work. These roles include:

- Advising and guiding members
- Building opportunities for dialogue between communities and agencies
- Influencing policy through information, guidance and advice
- Providing and delivering services
- Making representation to decision makers
- Sign-posting and sharing of contacts / information
- Training and advancing the skills / knowledge of others

Our activities are also connected to a wide range of issues that affect rural communities such as:

- Community Development / Engagement
- Economic Development
- Environment
- Health and Social Care
- Housing
- Planning
- Social and Public Policy

This breadth of work and expertise is a strength of CCA; we are unique in the North West region for this capability. However, this also creates a challenge when communicating our vision and mission externally. **Meeting our vision and mission is our prime purpose; our depth of knowledge and range of expertise simply reflects the richness of modern rural community life.**

## 5. Who Are We

### 5.1 Board

The Board of CCA are highly connected, community-minded individuals who support the Vision and Mission of CCA.

Board Members are both Directors of the limited company and trustees of the charity (see section 1). Their roles are as follows:

1. As Directors, they set the strategy of the organisation
2. As Trustees, they have powers of administration of assets in trust with a legal obligation to administer them solely for the purposes specified.

There is an induction process for Board Members, who are regularly updated on all aspects of their legal, ethical and moral requirements. All Board Members are provided with a comprehensive handbook and sign a Code of Conduct and are expected to play an active role in the leadership and representation of the charity including reference to regulatory body guidance with respect to their roles (see links to charity commission and companies house below. The Board recruitment process is influenced by skills / knowledge gaps and the business needs of our priorities.

The Board meet formally six times a year and have appointed a Scrutiny Committee to support senior staff to ensure the Board functions as an effective accountable agent within the charity. At our Annual General Meeting (held in November) one third of the Board stand down for re-election by the members.

A list of current Board Members can be found in Appendix 1.

Charity Commission Essential Trustee Guide:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/816777/CC3\\_may18.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/816777/CC3_may18.pdf)

Companies House Guidance on 'being a company director':

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/being-a-company-director>

### 5.2 Staff

The staff are the greatest asset of the organisation and are highly valued by the Board. The staff team is CCA's main asset, in particular its passion and commitment to supporting people within our communities. CCA has a team of 13 staff, and using our internal Code of Conduct, the staff are supported and involved with the decision-making of the organisation. In order to maintain a high standard and quality, our activities are knowledge-based and people-intensive. CCA invests in its staff by encouraging the take-up of training and development opportunities and the creation of new ideas and solutions to problems.

A diagram of the organisation's staff team can be found in Appendix 1.

### 5.3 Volunteers

We value the time and dedication of volunteers supporting our communities. We do have volunteers that support delivery of various projects and services, as well as our Board Members. We support all volunteers to best practice standards and offer training where appropriate. We value the commitment of time, skills and enthusiasm given to fulfil the mission of CCA.

## 5.4 Members

CCA has a wide membership which includes local councils, community building management committees and individual rural residents. Board members can come from any of the 3 membership areas.

We typically have between 120 and 180 paid members at any one time. There are many diverse benefits to members and these are reviewed annually, along with discounted membership at part-yearly points.

All members have the opportunity to take part in the governance of CCA by attending the Annual General Meeting and voting on Board Elections, appointment of auditors and approval of audited accounts. Members can nominate new Board Members for election subject to vacancies available and to their meeting the suitable skills requirements. There are also other events run by CCA to inform and support its members throughout the year as well as publications on issues relevant to members.

## 6 Finance

### 6.1 Overview

CCA receives both restricted and unrestricted funding. Our financial policies and procedures are robust and comply with all the legal and ethical requirements required of a Charity by the Charity Commission. The senior staff are supported in the management and forecasting of finance by the Board. They make regular detailed presentations on performance and forecasts to the Board. The Scrutiny Committee provides appropriate oversight of the finances.

Like all charities CCA has experienced significant changes in its expected reporting, funding and outcomes since 2010. The reductions across all public sector spending in this time have presented challenges to the voluntary sector as a whole, and it is one that CCA has responded to. Over the past few years we have restructured our governance processes, reviewed our management systems and reviewed all areas of expense to ensure we direct our financial resources in the most effective and efficient manner. More of our expertise and skills has been deployed in a commercial manner to increase our unrestricted income and provide opportunities to choose how to allocate resources.

CCA has, is and will be a financially robust organisation that operates within its means and for the benefit of its stated mission. Our annual accounts are available to view from the Charity Commission website at:

<http://apps.charitycommission.gov.uk/Showcharity/RegisterOfCharities/FinancialHistory.aspx?RegisteredCharityNumber=1074676&SubsidiaryNumber=0>

### 6.2 Measuring Value

CCA recognises that as a charity its impact exceeds financial measurements. We strive to find appropriate, cost-effective ways to measure the value of our work on rural communities. This includes standard project and contract quarterly reporting, case studies, commissioned evaluation of our work and internal review of our activities.

## 7 Marketing and Communications

CCA's Business Plan requires that the organisation has effective and efficient communication mechanisms both internally for staff, Board Members and volunteers, and for external marketing to beneficiaries, commissioners, funders and other stakeholders. It is also required to raise the organisation's profile and help retain credibility in an increasingly competitive external operating environment. Therefore, CCA has a separate marketing and communications strategy that sets out the priorities and mechanisms to achieve this.

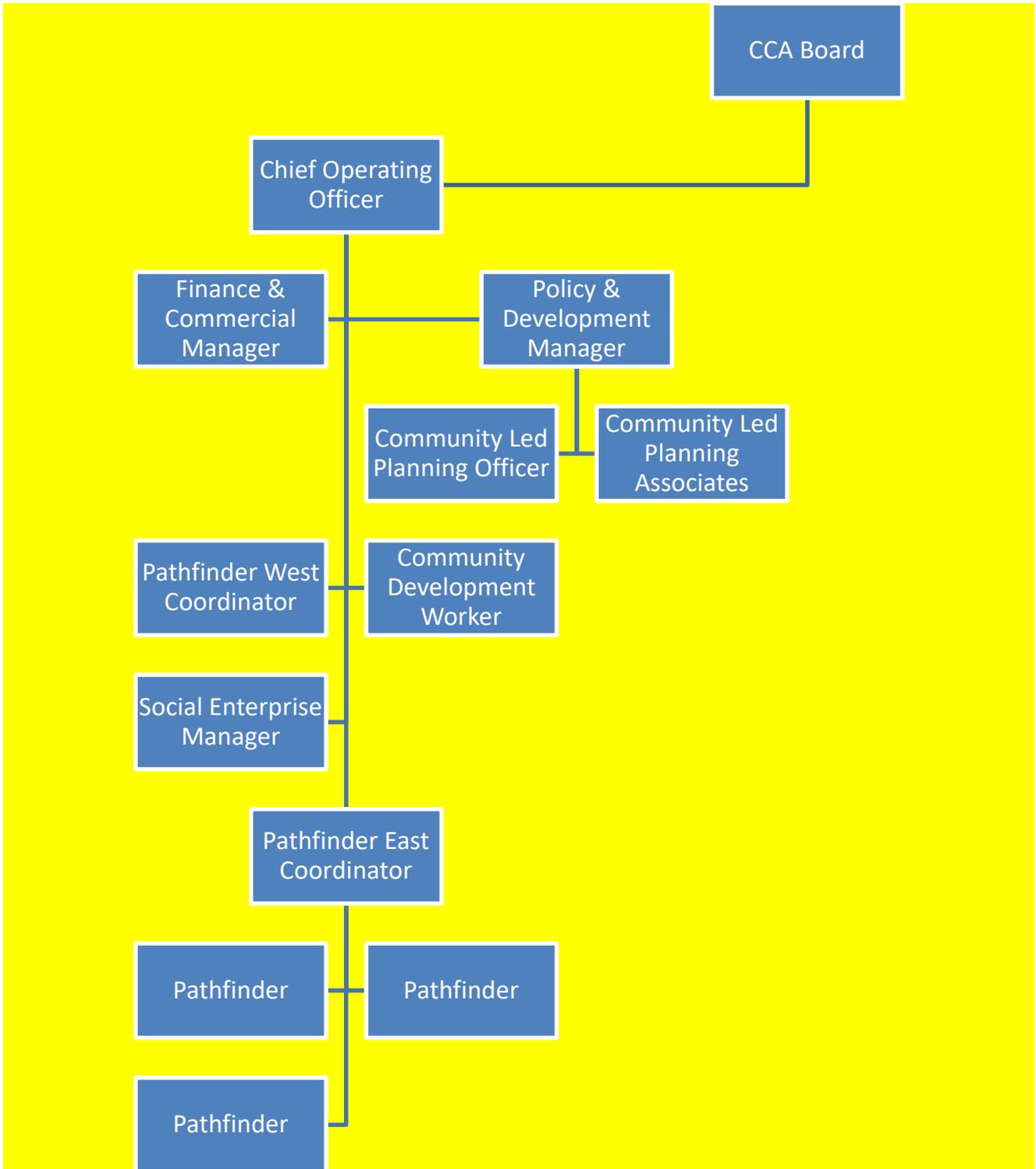
## 8 Digital Tools

CCA uses a range of digital 'tools' to facilitate efficient operations and communication. These come under three broad categories:

- 1. Internal operations** – e.g. email server and calendar sharing, cloud file sharing, Microsoft Office, SAGE and surveymonkey. We also carry out several core operational tasks using online facilities such as banking and annual returns to the charity commission and companies house.
- 2. Service delivery** – e.g. contract management using 'Upshot' software to monitor delivery of adult health services in Cheshire West, Pathfinder health and wellbeing services provide digital access at home to apply for welfare using a tablet, and we also deliver remote training online using screen sharing software.
- 3. Marketing and external communications** – this includes our website, social media accounts (facebook and twitter) and external email communications. We are also part of several national forums (e.g. ACRE and National Community-Led Housing Networks) that communicate primarily using digital tools such as 'basecamp'.

## Appendix 1: Our People

A charity's key resource is its people; CCA has a highly experienced and knowledgeable group of committed Board Members, staff and volunteers to effectively fulfil the mission of the charity. The diagram below shows our organisational structure, followed by a list of current personnel as of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019.



## **Board Members**

**Chairman – Kathy Benn MBE**

**Mike Dixon (Board and Scrutiny Committee)**

**Edward Brady (Board and Scrutiny Committee)**

**Belinda Boardman (Board and Scrutiny Committee)**

**Leonard Jones**

**Rev. Canon David Felix**

**Jackie Weaver**

Further details here:

<http://www.cheshireaction.org.uk/the-board/>

## Appendix 2: CHESHIRE COMMUNITY ACTION STRATEGY ROAD MAP

