



ACT Service Development Plan

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1. Introduction

Aspiring Communities Together (ACT) is a Sheffield-based charity committed to improving the lives of the local BAME (Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic) communities. ACT plays a key role in supporting individuals and families, currently positioning themselves as a community hub, they focus on supporting their community in areas such as education, health, and social well-being. The organisation provides a range of services, including youth programmes, culturally sensitive health initiatives, language education, advocacy and community support groups. These services aim to promote empowerment, foster social connections, and offer essential resources to those in need.

Operating from multiple sites, ACT's services are highly valued by the community, but like many charities, it faces ongoing challenges in maintaining financial stability and ensuring sustainable growth. The reliance on short-term grant funding and a largely volunteer-led staffing model has made it difficult to secure the long-term viability of several key programmes. With increasing demand for its services, ACT is at a crucial point where a review of its development plan is necessary to ensure its continued effectiveness and relevance.

This review will focus on evaluating the current state of ACT's services, identifying areas for improvement, and recommending steps to strengthen its operational and financial foundations. The aim is to create a clear roadmap that will help ACT build resilience, enhance its service delivery, and secure its future.

Current Challenges

ACT operates in some of Sheffield's most deprived areas, including Firvale and Burngreave, where BAME communities face significant socio-economic challenges. These challenges include high unemployment, health inequalities, high refugee population and language barriers, all of which have been exacerbated by the ongoing cost of living crisis. In response, ACT has been working to fill gaps in local service provision, offering a lifeline to vulnerable groups through its community café, health workshops, youth activities, and support services.

However, many of ACT's programmes rely heavily on temporary funding streams, which are often uncertain or short-lived. This has created an environment where it is difficult to plan for the future or to expand services to meet growing demand. Additionally, large areas of the work is carried out by volunteers (e.g. youth work and food pharmacy), and while this has helped keep costs low, it has also placed strain on the charity's ability to maintain consistent service delivery and long term sustainability.

Purpose of the Review

The purpose of this review is to provide a thorough assessment of ACT's current services and organisational model, with the goal of:

1. **Enhancing Service Effectiveness:** Ensuring that services are meeting the needs of the community, both in terms of reach and impact.
2. **Improving Financial Sustainability:** Developing strategies to diversify funding sources and reduce dependence on short-term grants.
3. **Strengthening Staffing and Capacity:** Moving towards a more sustainable staffing model that includes paid roles to secure the continuity and quality of services.

ACT's services are highly valued in the community as well as across Sheffield, but without a solid financial and operational foundation, the charity risks losing momentum. By addressing these issues now, ACT can safeguard its future and continue making a difference in the lives of Sheffield's BAME communities.

Strategic Importance

ACT is embedded within Sheffield's BAME population and has built strong relationships with community members, local authorities, and partner organisations. Its services play a critical role in bridging the gaps left by mainstream providers, particularly in areas like healthcare access and youth development. The BAME Health Plan, for example, is designed to tackle specific health disparities by offering culturally appropriate services, while the youth programmes and language school help keep young people engaged and supported in an area where social isolation and disengagement from education are common.

Given the increasing demand for these services, it is essential that ACT takes steps to strengthen its organisational capacity. This review will guide the development of a more robust service delivery model that aligns with the charity's strategic objectives, helping ACT to fulfil its mission more effectively.

Objectives of the Review

The key objectives of this review are:

1. **Assessing Current Services:** A detailed analysis of ACT's programmes, focusing on their operational effectiveness, community reach, and financial health.
2. **Setting Clear and Measurable Outcomes:** Establishing tangible targets for each programme to ensure they align with ACT's overall mission and can demonstrate real impact.
3. **Enhancing Sustainability:** Identifying opportunities to generate consistent income, particularly through expanding fee-based services, securing longer-term partnerships, and making better use of existing resources.
4. **Developing a Sustainable Staffing Model:** Moving away from a heavy reliance on volunteers by formalising key roles within the organisation, ensuring the necessary staff are in place to deliver high-quality, consistent services.

2. Current Services Overview

As part of this review, it's essential to assess the range of services that Aspiring Communities Together (ACT) currently delivers. This section provides an in-depth look at the core programmes, their operational structure, funding, and community engagement. Understanding the strengths and challenges of these services is crucial to identifying where improvements can be made and how sustainability can be achieved.

2.1 Youth Services

Description

ACT's youth programmes provide a vital service for young people from its serving area; Firvale, Page Hall and Burngreave. The programmes focus on both recreational and educational programmes, designed to engage and support young people at risk of social isolation or underachievement. Key activities include sports sessions, youth clubs, a language school and educational support workshops, offering young people safe spaces to develop skills, build friendships, and improve their overall well-being.

The youth programmes are particularly important as in these geographical areas young people face significant barriers, including high unemployment, limited access to extracurricular activities, and cultural pressures. ACT has worked to create youth spaces that are welcoming, inclusive, and responsive to the specific needs of their surrounding community.

Location

The programmes are primarily delivered from ACT's community centres, with occasional external activities such as trips and sports activities taking place at local facilities. The centres are strategically located within areas of high need, ensuring young people have easy access to the services.

Funding

Youth services are currently supported through a mix of short-term grant funding, donations, and in-kind contributions from local partners. However, this reliance on external funding leaves the programmes vulnerable to fluctuations, with no consistent source of income to ensure long-term stability.

Attendance

Attendance at the youth clubs is generally strong, with around 30-40 young people attending each week. However, the number of participants and activities fluctuates depending on the availability of volunteers and the stability of funding, making it difficult to plan for growth or offer more consistent programming.

Challenges

- I. **Sustainability:** With programmes largely reliant on temporary funding and volunteers, there is a need to secure long-term financial backing and transition to paid youth workers to ensure continuity and quality.
- II. **Limited Resources:** The current youth programmes are well-received but under-resourced, meaning there are missed opportunities for expanding activities, such as vocational training or mentoring schemes, which could further benefit the young people involved.

2.2 BAME Health Plan

Description

The BAME Health Plan is one of ACT's flagship programmes, developed in response to the significant health disparities experienced by the local geographical community. The plan includes a range of health-related services, from preventative health education to support for managing long-term conditions. Central to the programme are the culturally sensitive workshops and health ambassador training, which aim to improve understanding of healthcare systems, encourage healthier lifestyles, and empower participants to manage their own health more effectively.

One notable initiative within this plan is the Menopause Café, in partnership with PCN Foundry, which offers a safe space for women to discuss and learn about the menopause, a topic often overlooked within these communities. There are also workshops focused on mental health, chronic disease prevention, and fitness, all tailored to the specific needs of the individuals accessing ACT as a community hub.

The **Healthy Living Centre** offers a gym and social café, providing a vital space for the community to engage in fitness and wellbeing activities. The gym includes women-only sessions, catering to those who may feel uncomfortable exercising in mixed-gender environments. Despite the availability of these services, the gym is underutilised, with membership levels not reflecting the potential given the significant footfall at the Firvale Community Centre.

One of the key challenges is that the Healthy Living Centre remains under-promoted, with limited marketing beyond the immediate area. As a result, it is currently a hidden asset. To address this, targeted marketing and outreach initiatives are required to raise awareness and attract both local residents and individuals from other parts of the city. This presents an opportunity to introduce a tiered membership system that ensures affordability for the local community while appealing to a wider audience who may also be drawn by the social value of supporting a local organisation.

Additionally, maximising the use of the studio space could be achieved by renting it out to independent fitness instructors during non-peak times, offering classes such as dance or Zumba. This would further promote the centre and provide a source of additional income.

This aligns with ACT's broader objective of reducing health inequalities and improving access to culturally sensitive health services, as outlined in the Health Plan. Enhanced visibility and an expanded membership base will support the centre's sustainability and increase its overall impact within the community.

Challenges:

- Lack of promotion and visibility for the gym and classes.
- Underutilisation despite high footfall at the Firvale Community Centre.
- Limited membership growth due to a narrow marketing reach.

Location

Health services are provided both in ACT's community centres and through outreach

programmes in partnership with local NHS services. Some events, such as health fairs and ambassador training, take place in larger venues to accommodate broader attendance.

Funding

Funding for the BAME Health Plan comes from a combination of NHS partnerships, local authority grants, and occasional donations from health-focused charities. While some aspects of the programme receive consistent support, such as the menopause workshops, others are dependent on securing periodic grants, which creates uncertainty for long-term planning.

Attendance

Health workshops and events typically attract between 50-100 participants, with higher attendance for women's health initiatives. The ambassador training programme has had success in training local volunteers to support their peers, with a cohort of 15 health ambassadors currently active in the community.

Challenges

- I. Sustaining Growth: As demand for these services increases, particularly around mental health support and chronic illness management, ACT will need to secure more stable funding sources and explore partnerships with larger healthcare providers.
- II. Cultural Barriers: Although the health plan addresses cultural sensitivities, there is still more work to be done in overcoming taboos and encouraging more men to participate in mental health and chronic disease workshops.

2.3 Community Café and Social Initiatives

Description

The community café serves as both a social hub and a service delivery point for ACT. Open to all members of the community, the café provides affordable, healthy meals while creating a welcoming environment for social interaction, support, and informal learning. The café also plays host to various community events, workshops, and health awareness sessions, helping to break down social isolation and encourage community engagement.

In addition to its role as a meeting place, the café contributes to ACT's wider health and well-being agenda, promoting healthy eating and providing a space for informal support groups, including those related to mental health and women's health issues, and offering a space to create meals for the food pharmacy programme.

Location

The café operates from ACT's main community centre in Firvale and is open several days a week. It is also used as a base for some of the organisation's health and well-being workshops.

Funding

The café generates some income from food sales, though this is minimal and does not cover operating costs. The shortfall is made up through donations and occasional grants, but the café's long-term sustainability remains in question without a more robust revenue model.

Attendance

The café is well-used, with an average of 200 visitors each week, particularly on days when community events or workshops are scheduled. Its popularity shows its importance to the local community as both a social space and a point of access to ACT's wider services.

Challenges

- I. **Financial Sustainability:** The café is not currently self-sufficient and relies on subsidies from other parts of the organisation. Increasing income through higher footfall or diversifying the café's offerings (e.g. catering services) could help improve its financial viability.
- II. **Capacity:** As a key social hub, the café is often at capacity, limiting the number of people who can benefit from the space. Expanding its hours or offering additional services could help meet the growing demand.

These core services form the backbone of ACT's community offering, but each faces significant challenges in terms of sustainability and capacity. In the next section, we will explore financial and staffing issues in greater depth, identifying key areas where ACT can strengthen its foundations to ensure these services continue to thrive and expand.

3. Financial Risk Assessment

ACT's current financial model relies heavily on external funding, particularly short-term grants and donations. While this funding has enabled ACT to establish and run several valuable services, it also places the organisation in a precarious position, with the continuity of many programmes subject to the availability and renewal of grants. This section assesses the financial risks ACT faces, focusing on income streams, financial sustainability, and potential measures to secure long-term financial health.

Income Streams and Current Financial Viability

Grant Dependency

ACT is primarily funded through grants from local councils, NHS partnerships, and other charitable foundations. These grants have enabled ACT to run critical services such as the BAME Health Plan and youth programmes, but they are typically short-term, with no guarantee of renewal. For example, ACT's current funding for the youth programmes and health initiatives has recently expired leaving significant uncertainty over the future of these services.

Grants, by their nature, come with specific conditions and are often tied to particular projects or outcomes. This restricts ACT's ability to use funds flexibly across services, making it difficult to cover operational costs or invest in new initiatives. Additionally, changes in government or funding priorities can result in a sudden withdrawal of financial support, leaving the charity exposed.

Room Rentals

ACT has several community centres at its disposal, yet it is not fully capitalising on these assets. While some income is generated from renting rooms to external organisations and groups, the current rates are potentially significantly below market value compared to similar spaces offered by other community organisations in Sheffield. Moreover, there are hours during the week when the spaces remain underutilised. Making sure room hire rates are set at market value and optimising the use of these facilities could provide a steady, reliable source of income.

Fee-Based Services

ACT offers a range of services at little to no cost to participants, including youth clubs, health

workshops, and social initiatives. While this ensures services are accessible to the community, it also places a financial strain on the charity. Introducing a modest fee structure for some services could help cover operational costs while still ensuring accessibility for low-income participants. For example, charging a small fee for certain health workshops or youth activities could provide a new revenue stream, especially if targeted at participants who can afford to contribute.

Café Income

As outlined in the previous section, the community café generates some income, but this is minimal and does not cover its running costs. While it serves an important social function, the café's financial sustainability is in question. Expanding the café's role—such as offering catering for local events or extending its opening hours—could help increase revenue, but this would require additional investment in staff and resources.

Health and Wellbeing Centre

The Health and Wellbeing Centre at ACT provides a gym and studio space for individuals in the community who wish to improve their fitness and overall wellbeing. The gym offers women-only sessions, catering to those who may feel uncomfortable training alongside men. Although the gym has a membership system in place, it is currently underutilised, especially considering the high footfall at the Firvale Community Centre, where it is located. There is significant potential to increase membership, not only from the local community but from across the wider city. To achieve this, marketing efforts need to extend beyond the centre itself, reaching out to a broader audience who may be interested in supporting a local community organisation while accessing an affordable gym.

ACT should consider introducing tiered membership options to ensure that local residents can continue to afford access, whilst also attracting members from other parts of the city. This approach would increase gym usage and strengthen ACT's mission of supporting and empowering the community.

In addition to the gym, the studio hosts fitness classes; however, these classes are not well publicised and are missing out on potential attendees from the local area and beyond. ACT could benefit from hiring out the studio to independent fitness instructors, such as those offering dance or Zumba classes, during unused times. This would increase the centre's visibility, maximise use of the space, and generate additional income.

Financial Risks

1. Dependency on Unpredictable Grants

ACT's reliance on short-term, project-based funding is one of its biggest financial risks. The uncertainty surrounding grant renewals means that ACT is constantly in a reactive position, seeking new funding opportunities just to maintain its existing services. This limits the organisation's ability to plan long-term and can lead to disruptions in service delivery when funding gaps arise.

For example, should the NHS or council grants that currently support the BAME Health Plan and the adult learning not be renewed, ACT would be forced to scale back

or even suspend these vital programmes. This would have a significant impact on the community, particularly for individuals who rely on these services for health support or social interaction.

2. Limited Income Diversification

ACT has few alternative income streams outside of grants. While donations and fundraising efforts provide some supplementary income, they are insufficient to cover the charity's running costs. This lack of income diversification leaves ACT exposed to funding fluctuations, as there is no safety net to fall back on if grants are lost.

Additionally, because many of ACT's services are offered for free or at a very low cost, there is limited opportunity to generate surplus income from within the organisation. Without a more structured approach to income generation, ACT will continue to face financial instability, with its future largely determined by external factors beyond its control.

3. Underutilisation of Physical Assets

ACT's community centres represent a significant but underutilised asset. While some rental income is generated, there is scope to increase this considerably. At present, much of the available space is not used at 100% capacity and although much of it houses the work of ACT, there are periods and potentially full days when it is underutilised with rooms being empty for several hours a week, including the fitness studio and an IT suite that could be rented out to other voluntary groups needing access to computers for their service users. This represents a missed opportunity to generate income that could support ACT's core services.

It's not clear whether ACT has any formal written agreements with current groups using their rooms and buildings. Should these not be in place there could be additional risks, particularly around safeguarding or maintenance costs, if the groups are not adhering to proper policies or if damage occurs to the property.

Recommendations for Financial Stability

To address these financial risks, ACT must diversify its income streams and better leverage its existing assets. Below are several key recommendations to improve ACT's financial position:

1. Maximise Room Rentals and Facility Use

One of the most immediate ways ACT can increase its income is by raising the rates it charges for room rentals, use of the fitness studio and the IT suite. Conducting a market analysis to compare rates charged by similar community centres in Sheffield would provide a benchmark for adjusting prices. This does not mean excluding local groups or pricing out smaller organisations, but by implementing tiered pricing or offering subsidised rates only to specific groups, ACT can generate more consistent income.

Additionally, ACT should formalise rental agreements for all external groups using its facilities, ensuring that the terms are clear and that the charity is not taking on undue financial or legal risks. These agreements should include standard clauses around insurance, safeguarding, and maintenance responsibilities.

2. Introduce Fee-Based Services

While ACT's mission is to support those most in need, there is a growing recognition that introducing small fees for certain services can help improve financial sustainability without alienating or excluding community members. ACT should consider implementing a sliding fee scale for activities like health workshops or youth programmes, where participants pay based on their income level. This could be particularly effective for services that attract a wider demographic, some of whom may be able to afford modest contributions.

For services like the community café, ACT could explore offering paid add-ons, such as catering services or workshops that charge a small fee to cover costs. By positioning these services as value-added offerings, ACT can generate additional revenue while maintaining the community focus. A similar model could also work for the Fitness Centre where members have access to a personal trainer at an extra cost.

3. Diversify Funding Sources

While grant funding will likely remain a core part of ACT's income, it is essential to diversify funding sources to reduce the risks associated with relying on any single type of income. ACT should explore opportunities for corporate sponsorship, particularly from local businesses that have a vested interest in supporting the community. Sponsorship could be sought for specific programmes, such as youth activities or the food pharmacy providing a more stable funding stream over multiple years.

Additionally, ACT could consider launching targeted fundraising campaigns, such as community events or crowdfunding, which directly involve local residents in supporting the charity's work. Engaging the community in this way not only raises funds but also builds a stronger sense of ownership and support for ACT's mission within the community they are serving..

4. Develop a Financial Reserves Policy

To protect against financial shocks, ACT should develop a reserves policy, aiming to hold 3-6 months' worth of operational costs in reserve. This contingency fund would provide a buffer in case of unexpected shortfalls in funding or delays in grant payments. Building up reserves will take time, but even small, regular contributions from surpluses or unrestricted income can help create a financial safety net.

ACT's current financial model presents several risks, primarily due to its dependence on short-term grants and the underutilisation of key assets like its community centres. By maximising income from room rentals, the fitness studio and the IT suits, introducing fees for selected services, and diversifying funding sources, ACT can build a more sustainable financial base. Furthermore, creating a financial reserves policy will help the charity navigate any future funding challenges, ensuring it can continue to support the community without disruption.

4. Staffing and Operational Efficiency

ACT's staffing model is currently built around a mix of volunteers and a small number of paid staff, with the majority of its services being run by volunteers. While this has allowed

the organisation to deliver a wide range of programmes on limited budgets, it has also introduced significant challenges in terms of operational efficiency and service continuity. Volunteers are critical to ACT's operations, but the reliance on volunteer-led services poses risks in maintaining consistent quality, scaling up activities, and meeting growing community needs.

In this section, we will explore the current state of ACT's staffing, the challenges it faces, and recommendations to improve operational efficiency through better workforce management, staff succession planning, and investment in paid roles.

4.1 Current Staffing Model

Volunteers

ACT relies heavily on its dedicated pool of volunteers to deliver services, especially in areas such as youth programmes, community events, the food pharmacy and the running of the community café. While volunteers are a tremendous asset to the organisation, their availability can be unpredictable, which often leads to inconsistency in service delivery. Volunteer fatigue and turnover are common, and without a structured system for volunteer management and retention, ACT risks losing valuable knowledge and experience when volunteers move on.

Many of the volunteers come from the local community, reflecting ACT's grassroots approach, which helps foster trust and strong relationships with service users. However, the lack of formal training and development opportunities for volunteers can limit the effectiveness of the services provided. Moreover, without a clear path for progression or more formal roles, ACT may struggle to keep volunteers engaged over the long term.

Paid Staff

ACT currently has a small number of paid staff who handle key operational roles, including project management, administration, finances and service coordination. However, there are no full-time staff dedicated solely to service delivery. For example, ACT's youth services and health programmes are managed by part-time staff, meaning there is limited capacity to expand or develop these initiatives beyond their current scope.

Paid staff are stretched thin across multiple responsibilities, often performing both frontline service delivery and administrative tasks, which can affect their ability to focus on improving and scaling programmes. Furthermore, the lack of dedicated leadership, beyond the CEO, in critical areas such as youth work and health education prevents the organisation from implementing more structured, long-term plans.

Skills Gaps

While ACT's volunteers and staff are passionate and committed, there are noticeable skill gaps in areas such as project management, fundraising, and monitoring and evaluation. These gaps hinder ACT's ability to pursue new funding opportunities, expand services, and ensure that programmes are achieving the desired outcomes. Investing in training and development for both volunteers and staff would significantly enhance operational efficiency and the overall impact of the charity.

4.2 Challenges

1. Volunteer Reliance and Inconsistency

Relying heavily on volunteers creates operational challenges. Volunteer turnover is frequent, and with limited training, volunteers may not always have the necessary skills to deliver services effectively. Additionally, the lack of a formal structure around volunteer recruitment, training, and retention means ACT struggles to maintain consistent service quality, especially when volunteers are unavailable or leave the organisation.

2. Limited Paid Staffing

ACT's small paid staff team is overextended, handling both administrative duties and direct service delivery. This can not only affect staff morale but can also limit the organisation's capacity to grow its services or respond quickly to emerging community needs. Without additional full-time, paid roles, ACT will find it difficult to scale up key programmes such as the BAME Health Plan, youth services or food pharmacy.

3. Staff Succession Planning

There is currently no formal system in place for staff succession at ACT. This is a significant risk, especially as the organisation grows. If a key staff member were to leave, it could disrupt critical services and place additional pressure on the remaining team. Without a clear plan for succession, ACT may struggle to retain institutional knowledge and continue service delivery without interruption.

In addition to this The Board of Trustees are increasingly reliant on the knowledge and the direction of the CEO, potentially leaving the charity in a very difficult position should the CEO leave, with a Board of Trustees lacking the relevant knowledge to keep driving the organisation forward during any leadership transition phase.

4. Lack of Professional Development Opportunities

While ACT's staff and volunteers are dedicated to the cause, there is a need for ongoing professional development to ensure they have the skills required to manage growing services effectively. This includes areas such as safeguarding, project management, fundraising, and community engagement. Providing more opportunities for training would not only improve service delivery but also increase staff and volunteer satisfaction, helping to retain talent over the long term.

4.3 Recommendations for Improved Staffing and Operational Efficiency

1. Transition to a Sustainable Paid Staffing Model

To ensure long-term sustainability, ACT should gradually transition from a predominantly volunteer-led model to one that includes a stronger core of paid staff. The first step in this transition should be to secure funding for key full-time roles, such as a Youth Worker, Health and Well-being Coordinator, and Community Development Worker. These roles are essential to providing consistent, high-quality services and ensuring that ACT can meet the growing needs of the community. For example, the youth services would greatly benefit from a full-time youth worker who could take charge of programme planning, volunteer coordination, and developing partnerships with local schools and youth organisations. Similarly, a full-time health and well-being coordinator would allow ACT to expand its BAME Health Plan by

developing new health initiatives, securing additional partnerships, and ensuring that the programme has the resources it needs to grow.

2. Formalise Volunteer Management and Retention Strategies

While volunteers will continue to play an important role in ACT's service delivery, there needs to be a more formalised structure in place for recruiting, training, and retaining them. This could include:

- **Volunteer Training Programmes:** Offering regular training sessions in areas such as safeguarding, first aid, and leadership skills. This will help ensure that volunteers are well-equipped to deliver services safely and effectively.
- **Recognition and Reward Schemes:** Implementing schemes to recognise the contributions of volunteers, such as certificates, awards, or community events, could help improve retention and motivate volunteers to stay engaged.
- **Volunteer Progression Pathways:** Providing clear pathways for volunteers to take on more responsibilities, including the possibility of transitioning into paid roles, would encourage long-term commitment and help ACT develop a pool of skilled, experienced workers.

3. Develop a Staff Succession Plan

ACT should develop a formal succession plan to ensure the continuity of services if key staff members leave. This plan would involve identifying critical roles within the organisation and ensuring that there are clear, documented procedures for transferring knowledge and responsibilities. Succession planning might also include pairing junior staff or volunteers with senior staff for mentorship and skills development, ensuring that there is always someone ready to step into a key role if needed. For example, in the case of the Community Health Ambassador Programme, where volunteers play a significant role in delivering health workshops, having a clear succession plan for the programme's coordinator will ensure that health services continue without disruption.

4. Invest in Staff and Volunteer Development

ACT must prioritise professional development for both its staff and volunteers. Offering regular training opportunities in project management, fundraising, monitoring and evaluation, and community engagement will improve the overall efficiency and impact of the charity's services. This could be achieved through a combination of in-house training sessions, online courses, and partnerships with other local organisations that offer skill-building opportunities. Investing in development will also improve staff retention by demonstrating ACT's commitment to its team's professional growth, creating a more motivated and capable workforce.

5. Expand Partnerships for Staffing Support

ACT could explore partnerships with local authorities, educational institutions, and other charities to share staffing resources. For example, working closely with Sheffield City Council or local schools could provide access to youth workers or community development officers who can support ACT's programmes. Additionally, collaborative partnerships with other organisations working in health or youth services could help ACT share best practices and pool resources to tackle common challenges.

To ensure its long-term success, ACT must address its current reliance on volunteers and limited paid staff by investing in a more sustainable staffing model. This will require a shift towards securing funding for key paid roles while also formalising volunteer management and creating a clear succession plan. By investing in staff and volunteer development, ACT can improve operational efficiency, increase the quality of its services, and ensure that it has the capacity to grow and meet the evolving needs of the diverse, local community it serves..

5. Service Development Plan

This section outlines a detailed service development plan, focusing on both short-term and long-term objectives to strengthen ACT's service delivery, optimise resource use, and ensure financial and operational sustainability. Key to this will be formalising relationships, improving service ownership, and introducing new funding strategies to maintain and grow the organisation's impact.

5.1 Short-Term Objectives (12-18 months)

In the immediate future, ACT must focus on consolidating its existing services and laying the groundwork for sustainable growth. The key short-term objectives include securing stable funding, formalising partnerships, and making better use of ACT's physical assets.

1. Expand and Formalise Health Services

The BAME Health Plan has become a cornerstone of ACT's service offering, addressing critical health disparities in the local community. The next step in its development is to formalise and expand its reach by increasing partnerships with healthcare providers and securing more consistent funding sources.

Menopause Café Expansion: Given the success of the menopause support group, ACT should aim to expand this initiative by offering additional sessions and extending its reach to its different community centres. This will require securing additional funding, either through the NHS or community health grants, to cover the cost of staff and materials.

Mental Health Support: Mental health services, particularly those aimed at men in the BAME community, are in high demand but currently under-resourced. By formalising partnerships with local mental health organisations, ACT can enhance its mental health services and create more regular support groups.

Timeline: Secure funding for mental health workshops by Q2 2025, and expand Menopause Café sessions by Q3 2025.

Assigned Responsibility: CEO, Board of Trustees and Health and Well-being Coordinator, in partnership with the NHS and local mental health services.

2. Formalise Youth Programmes and Secure Funding

ACT's youth programmes, while popular, are reliant on temporary grant funding and the goodwill of volunteers. There is significant potential to formalise these programmes and secure longer-term funding to expand youth work.

Full-Time Youth Worker: One of the key steps for the youth programme is the recruitment of a full-time youth worker who can oversee activities, coordinate volunteers, and expand

partnerships with local schools and youth organisations. Funding for this role should be a top priority, as it will ensure the long-term viability of the youth services.

Youth Partnerships: ACT should also formalise partnerships with Sheffield City Council's youth team and other local youth organisations to increase the range of services offered to young people. This could include joint activities, shared resources, and opportunities for ACT to host externally funded youth workers in its community centres.

Timeline: Secure funding for a full-time youth worker by Q2 2025, with formal partnerships in place by Q3 2025.

Assigned Responsibility: CEO to drive the funding, once in place Youth Worker / Youth Programme Manager, working closely with local schools and council representatives.

3. Maximise Space Rental Income

ACT's community centres represent an underutilised asset, with potential to generate significant additional income through space rentals. Currently, many of the rooms are rented at below-market rates, or are available for free to external groups. A short-term goal is to optimise the use of these spaces and implement a more structured rental model.

Adjust Rental Rates: Conduct a market analysis of similar community spaces in Sheffield to establish competitive rental rates for ACT's rooms and facilities. While it's important not to alienate local groups that rely on the space, implementing tiered pricing structures could ensure that ACT maximises income while still supporting community initiatives.

Formalise Agreements: For all external groups using ACT's spaces, formal rental agreements should be introduced to ensure clarity on financial contributions, responsibilities, and use of space. This will reduce the risk of informal arrangements that might not benefit the organisation financially.

Timeline: Conduct market analysis and adjust rental rates by Q1 2025. Introduce formal rental agreements for all external groups by Q2 2025.

Assigned Responsibility: CEO, in collaboration with external consultants to assess local market conditions.

4. Develop Monitoring and Evaluation Systems

To ensure that services are achieving the desired outcomes and to strengthen future funding applications, ACT needs to introduce more robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems across all programmes.

Data Collection: ACT should begin collecting data on key performance indicators (KPIs) for each service, such as attendance, participant satisfaction, and long-term outcomes (e.g., improved health, educational achievements). This data will not only help refine services but also provide a strong evidence base for securing future funding.

Digital Monitoring Systems: Investing in digital tools for monitoring and evaluation, such as client management software, will allow ACT to track service usage and outcomes more efficiently. Digital systems also make it easier to report to funders and ensure compliance with grant conditions.

Timeline: Implement digital M&E systems by Q2 2025, with full data collection across all programmes by Q3 2025.

Assigned Responsibility: CEO and Trustees working with programme managers and external consultants for software implementation.

5.2 Long-Term Objectives (2-5 years)

As ACT builds stronger foundations over the next 12-18 months, the focus will shift towards long-term growth and sustainability. This will include diversifying income streams, expanding services, and positioning ACT as a key service provider within Sheffield's BAME community.

1. Develop Trading Model for Revenue Generation

To reduce reliance on short-term grant funding, ACT should explore establishing trading models that can generate sustainable income while aligning with the organisation's mission.

Café Expansion and Catering Services: One of the most promising opportunities for revenue generation is the community café. Expanding the café's hours, introducing catering services for local events, or offering cooking classes could all provide additional income streams. By tapping into the local food scene, local food social enterprises and marketing the café as a cultural hub, ACT can attract new customers while staying true to its community roots.

Community Training Programmes: ACT could expand their adult learning offer and develop private fee-based vocational training programmes and workshops in areas such as IT, language skills, and health. These services could target local residents as well as those outside of the local area looking to improve their employment prospects and could generate income through participant fees in addition to the local authority employment initiatives they are already a part of.

Timeline: Develop a business plan for café expansion and catering services by Q1 2026. Launch the first vocational training programme by Q3 2026.

Assigned Responsibility: CEO.

2. Diversify Funding Sources

While grants will remain an important part of ACT's funding model, the organisation should focus on developing more diverse and stable income sources. This will reduce financial risks and enable ACT to pursue more ambitious long-term goals.

Corporate Sponsorships: ACT should explore partnerships with local businesses, particularly those with a strong community focus or corporate social responsibility (CSR) programmes. Corporate sponsorship could be targeted towards specific services, such as youth programmes or health initiatives, with businesses providing multi-year support.

Community Fundraising: Developing a community fundraising strategy could help ACT engage local residents and businesses in supporting its mission. This could include launching crowdfunding campaigns, hosting fundraising events, or seeking regular donations from local supporters.

National Funders: ACT should also apply for larger, multi-year grants from national and international funders, such as the National Lottery Community Fund or the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. These grants could provide long-term security for key services, reducing ACT's reliance on short-term local funding. In order to be successful with such funders, ACT need to make sure their monitoring systems are in place and robust.

Timeline: Develop a corporate sponsorship action plan by the end of 2024. Secure the first corporate sponsorship by Q4 2025. Launch a community fundraising campaign by Q2 2026.

Assigned Responsibility: Consultants to develop corporate sponsorship action plan, Financial Manager, supported by the CEO

3. Expand Health and Well-being Services

The BAME Health Plan is expected to grow significantly over the next few years, addressing a wider range of health issues and expanding its reach to other parts of Sheffield.

Chronic Disease Management: One area for expansion is chronic disease management, particularly for conditions like diabetes and cardiovascular disease, which disproportionately affect BAME communities. ACT could partner with local healthcare providers to offer regular clinics and workshops on disease prevention and management.

Mental Health Services: As mental health needs continue to rise, ACT should seek additional funding to expand its mental health services, particularly for men and young people. This could include both group therapy sessions and one-to-one support, delivered in partnership with mental health professionals.

Timeline: Secure funding for chronic disease management workshops by Q1 2026, and expand mental health services by Q3 2026.

Assigned Responsibility: CEO, Trustees and Health and Well-being Coordinator, working with local NHS partners.

5.3 Sustainability and Risk Management

Ensuring the long-term sustainability of ACT's services will require careful risk management and ongoing evaluation. The following strategies are key to reducing financial and operational risks:

Financial Reserves: ACT should establish a financial reserves policy, aiming to build up 3-6 months' worth of operating expenses. This contingency fund will help protect the organisation from unexpected funding shortfalls or emergencies.

Service Audits: Conducting annual audits of all services will allow ACT to identify areas where resources can be better allocated or where underperforming services can be restructured or discontinued.

Staffing Continuity: ACT's success will depend on maintaining a stable workforce. As part of its long-term planning, ACT should introduce succession planning for key roles and continue to invest in staff development to retain talent.

6. Sustainability and Succession Planning

Ensuring the long-term sustainability of ACT's operations, programmes, and workforce is essential for the continued success of the organisation. This section focuses on the strategies that will help ACT maintain its services over time, secure stable funding, and ensure continuity in staffing and leadership roles.

6.1 Financial Sustainability

ACT's reliance on short-term grants presents a significant risk to its long-term viability. To address this, the organisation needs a multi-pronged approach to secure stable, diverse funding sources while improving its operational efficiency.

1. Diversified Funding Model

As explored in earlier sections, diversifying income streams will be key to ensuring the financial sustainability of ACT. This includes:

Social Enterprise Initiatives: Developing income-generating projects such as the café expansion and vocational training programmes.

Corporate Sponsorship and Donations: Seeking support from businesses that are keen to invest in community-focused organisations.

Long-Term Grants: Applying for multi-year funding from national bodies like the National Lottery or the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

By diversifying income sources, ACT can reduce its dependency on volatile grant funding and secure a more predictable financial future.

2. Build Financial Reserves

In addition to diversifying income, ACT should aim to build a financial reserves fund equivalent to 3-6 months of operating costs. This reserve would act as a buffer in case of funding gaps or emergencies, allowing the organisation to continue operating while alternative funds are secured. Building these reserves gradually through a mix of surplus income and fundraising campaigns will provide ACT with the stability it needs for long-term planning.

3. Improve Cost Efficiency

ACT can also enhance sustainability by making more efficient use of its resources. Conducting a thorough cost-efficiency review could help identify areas where operational costs can be reduced without affecting service quality. This might involve streamlining administrative tasks, renegotiating supplier contracts, or improving the energy efficiency of ACT's community centres.

6.2 Staff Succession Planning

One of the major risks to ACT's sustainability is the lack of formal succession planning for staff and leadership roles. As the organisation grows, it will need to ensure that key roles can

be filled smoothly and without disruption to services. Implementing a succession planning strategy will help ACT retain valuable knowledge and ensure continuity in service delivery.

1. Mentorship and Training

ACT should introduce a mentorship programme to pair junior staff and volunteers with senior leaders, allowing knowledge transfer and preparing individuals for potential leadership roles. This will help to ensure that if a key staff member leaves, there are trained individuals ready to step into their role.

2. Internal Promotion Pathways

Creating clear internal career pathways for staff and volunteers will improve retention and ensure continuity in staffing. This can involve offering additional training, leadership development programmes, and opportunities for internal promotion, giving employees and volunteers a sense of progression within the organisation.

3. Succession Plan for Key Roles

ACT should identify key roles within the organisation that are critical to the delivery of services, such as a Youth Programme Manager, Health and Well-being Coordinator, and CEO. A formal succession plan for each of these roles should be developed, ensuring there are clear procedures for replacing staff and that backup candidates are identified and prepared to take on leadership responsibilities if needed.

6.3 Volunteer Retention and Development

Given the importance of volunteers to ACT's operations, volunteer retention is a critical component of the organisation's sustainability strategy. To ensure long-term engagement and avoid burnout, ACT should focus on developing its volunteer programme in the following ways:

1. Structured Volunteer Roles

ACT should create formal job descriptions and structured roles for volunteers, offering them clear responsibilities, expectations, and opportunities for development. Formalising these roles will help volunteers feel more valued and increase their commitment to the organisation.

2. Regular Recognition and Support

Implementing a volunteer recognition programme, which could include awards, certificates, or public acknowledgment, will help boost volunteer morale and retention. ACT should also provide ongoing support for volunteers, such as regular check-ins, training, and opportunities for feedback to ensure they feel supported in their roles.

3. Transitioning Volunteers to Paid Staff

For volunteers showing long-term commitment and aptitude, ACT should create pathways for transitioning them into paid staff roles. This would provide a pipeline of experienced, motivated individuals who are already familiar with the organisation's culture and objectives.

6.4 Operational Sustainability

To ensure long-term success, ACT must also focus on the sustainability of its operations. This includes adopting practices that reduce the organisation's environmental impact, improve efficiency, and ensure the continued relevance of its services.

1. Green Operations

ACT should explore ways to reduce its carbon footprint and implement environmentally sustainable practices in its community centres. This could include investing in energy-efficient lighting and heating, reducing waste, and encouraging recycling initiatives. By positioning itself as an environmentally conscious organisation, ACT can also appeal to funders and partners who prioritise sustainability.

2. Continuous Service Review

ACT's service offerings should be regularly reviewed to ensure they remain relevant to the changing needs of the community. This involves collecting feedback from service users, conducting needs assessments, and evaluating the performance of existing services. By being proactive in adapting to community needs, ACT can ensure it remains a vital resource for years to come.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

This section summarises the key findings from the in-depth review of ACT's current services, operational challenges, and sustainability planning. It provides clear recommendations that will guide the organisation in building a more resilient, financially sustainable, and operationally efficient future. By addressing these areas, ACT can secure its position as a vital resource for Sheffield's BAME communities and ensure that its services continue to evolve in response to community needs.

7.1 Summary of Key Findings

The review of ACT's current development plan and services highlights several strengths, but also identifies critical areas for improvement:

Service Impact and Community Value: ACT provides essential services that address the needs of Sheffield's BAME communities, particularly in health, youth engagement, and social cohesion. The BAME Health Plan, youth programmes, and community café are highly valued, but they are under-resourced and face sustainability challenges.

Financial Vulnerability: ACT's heavy reliance on short-term grant funding places its services at risk. The absence of diversified income streams and underutilisation of physical assets (e.g., community centre rentals) limits the organisation's ability to secure long-term financial stability.

Staffing and Operational Gaps: While ACT has a dedicated team of volunteers and part-time staff, the lack of full-time staff and succession planning creates vulnerabilities in service delivery. Volunteer reliance, without formalised training and retention strategies, also risks burnout and inconsistent service provision.

Opportunities for Growth: The review identifies clear opportunities to expand ACT's services, particularly in the areas of health and youth engagement. By formalising

partnerships, securing long-term funding, and developing income-generating initiatives, ACT has the potential to increase its reach and impact.

7.2 Key Recommendations

Based on the review, the following recommendations outline the strategic steps ACT should take to improve its financial stability, operational efficiency, and long-term sustainability:

1. Diversify Income Streams and Build Financial Resilience

To reduce reliance on short-term grants and improve financial sustainability, ACT should focus on:

Trading Income Generation: Develop the community café into a profitable social enterprise and explore other income-generating opportunities such as catering services or paid community workshops.

Maximise Room Rentals: Introduce market-aligned rental rates for community centre spaces, alongside formal agreements for all external groups using the facilities.

Corporate Sponsorship: Actively seek corporate sponsorships from local businesses that align with ACT's mission, providing a more stable source of income over multiple years.

Community Fundraising Campaigns: Engage local residents and businesses through fundraising events and regular donation drives, fostering a sense of ownership and support for ACT's services.

2. Invest in Staffing and Succession Planning

ACT's reliance on volunteers is unsustainable in the long term. To address this, the organisation should:

Work towards hiring Full-Time Staff: Secure funding for key full-time roles such as a Youth Worker, Health and Well-being Coordinator, and Community Development Worker to ensure consistency and growth in service delivery.

Develop Succession Plans: Create a formal succession plan for key roles, ensuring continuity in leadership and service provision if staff members leave.

Formalise Volunteer Management: Improve volunteer recruitment, training, and retention by offering structured roles, ongoing development opportunities, and recognition programmes. Consider creating pathways for volunteers to transition into paid roles.

3. Expand and Formalise Key Services

To strengthen ACT's service offerings, the following steps should be prioritised:

Youth Services: Formalise partnerships with local schools, youth organisations, and Sheffield City Council to enhance youth programme offerings. Secure long-term funding for a full-time Youth Worker to lead these services.

Health Services: Expand the BAME Health Plan by developing new health initiatives (e.g., chronic disease management and mental health support) in partnership with the NHS and other health providers. Ensure funding is secured for a dedicated Health and Well-being Coordinator.

Monitoring and Evaluation: Introduce robust monitoring systems to track service impact and outcomes. Collect and analyse data to support future funding applications and continuously improve service delivery.

4. Strengthen Organisational Governance and Efficiency

For ACT to grow and remain sustainable, it needs to optimise its operational structure:

Formalise Agreements: Introduce formal agreements with all external groups using ACT's facilities, clarifying rental rates, responsibilities, and safeguarding obligations.

Operational Audits: Conduct regular service and cost-efficiency audits to ensure resources are being used effectively and services are aligned with community needs.

Environmental Sustainability: Explore environmentally friendly initiatives within ACT's operations, such as improving energy efficiency at community centres, which could reduce costs and attract new funders.

5. Build a Stronger Relationship with the Community

To enhance community engagement and ensure ACT's services are meeting the needs of the BAME population, the organisation should:

Regular Community Feedback: Implement a structured system for collecting feedback from service users, such as surveys and focus groups, to better understand the evolving needs of the community.

Targeted Outreach: Expand outreach efforts, particularly for health and youth services, to ensure that ACT is reaching those who would benefit most from its services. This may include offering more services in different areas of Sheffield or increasing promotion through digital platforms and community events.

7.3 Roadmap for the Future

The following timeline outlines the key steps ACT should take over the next five years to implement these recommendations and secure a sustainable future:

Year 1 (2024-2025)

- Secure funding for full-time Youth Worker and Health Coordinator roles.
- Implement formal rental agreements and increase rental rates for community centre spaces.
- Expand health services, including mental health support and the Menopause Café.
- Introduce a formal volunteer management and recognition system.

Year 2 (2025-2026)

- Launch community fundraising campaigns and secure at least one corporate sponsorship.
- Expand the community café into a profitable social enterprise, offering catering services.
- Finalise and implement succession planning for key roles.
- Roll out digital monitoring and evaluation systems across all services.

Year 3-5 (2026-2029)

- Grow social enterprises, including vocational training programmes, to diversify income.
- Establish long-term partnerships with national funders and corporate sponsors to support expanded services.
- Build financial reserves equivalent to 3-6 months of operating costs.
- Continue expanding health and youth services in response to community feedback, ensuring that services evolve with the changing needs of Sheffield's BAME population.