



# Alt Valley Community Trust



### Location

Croxteth, Norris Green, Dovecot wards in North East Liverpool; some services Liverpool wide



### Founded

1987



### Legal structure

Registered charity and Company Limited by Guarantee



### Description of services

Initially supporting lifelong learning— now more broadly community engagement, regeneration, improving individual and community wellbeing.

## Overview of the business

Alt Valley Community Trust (AVCT) was an action group of local residents who came together in 1983 in protest at the potential closure of a local school. It was established as a charity in 1987 with a focus on education (saving the school), providing local adult learning sessions and vocational training but has expanded to specialise in community regeneration and wellbeing.

AVCT is a community-based social enterprise that provides a range of services to disadvantaged communities of North Liverpool. It has grown rapidly since 1987 in response to local community need, and now delivers a range of services including adult education, training and employment readiness, health and wellbeing, sports and leisure, provision of library services, community engagement and community asset management.

In recent years AVCT has taken a more prominent role in the delivery of public services. Working in partnership with local authorities

and a range of additional providers, the Trust delivers public services, such as three library services, on a commercially viable model. Similarly, cuts in local authority budgets has led to invitations from Liverpool City Council for AVCT to manage a number of failing or at risk community assets, including three local sports centres and two additional community centres.

The Trust is committed to helping individuals and enterprises in local disadvantaged communities to unlock and fulfil their potential. It is run by a team of knowledgeable and professional people who are passionate about the area and the people and organisations that make it special.

## Why is community accountability important?

For AVCT community accountability means being responsive to community need and supporting, enabling or delivering the response to that need: *'It's meaningful to us – we are responding to*



*community needs and that's what we do because we are part of the community, we don't have to wait for someone to tell us to do something, we know what's going on! We can support a response, or enable a response on a range of issues: crime, vandalism, etc. As a multi-functional organisation accountability needs a structure – we need to be able to develop and move forward, we can't have a community committee that meets on everything!*

Accountability is closely linked to the history and core purpose of the business, having been born from community need and activism: *'The only reason it formed was from local people occupying a school, being activists'*

There is a real sense that this ethos is maintained in how the organisation sees itself and engages with the community. Those involved with the business shared the view that *'local people know what the answers are'* and that it was important that the community felt able to influence the organisation: *'If I'm a member of the community I can do something about it – if things aren't working! It's that ability to pass judgement and know things will change if they aren't going well.'*

The success of AVCT's services (including sports centres, libraries, community learning centre, etc.) depends on support from the local community. For this reason community accountability plays an important role in building the relationship with people and sustaining/growing viable services: *'If it's not accountable or responsible people won't use it.'*

This ethos and approach was described by some as 'community responsibility' rather than accountability.

## What does accountability look like locally?

Here we use three categories to provide a snapshot of some of the mechanisms and methods that the business uses in community accountability. These categories are not hard and fast; there is some overlap between the areas outlined.

### Structures

- AVCT's AGM, held at the beginning of the year, is open to all staff, partner organisations and the local public. Typically between 80 and 100 people attend. It is an important mechanism for reflecting on the past year, setting the tone for the coming years work.
- There are action groups or 'sub-committees', made up of members of the public. These act as a way to feedback on the various streams of AVCT's work: *'It's about open communication channels – people being prepared to talk and tell, that opportunity to feedback.'*
- The Board also has personal accountability to the organisation and community: *'Of our nine Directors everyone has something to do with the community – everyone is connected and has a commitment to the community [i.e. geographical area and the people within it]. Because we live locally we are personally accountable as well as organisationally accountable.'*

### Relationships

- There are four Community Champions who engage individually with local people and spend time developing relationships. Their role is to act as a link to AVCT, across communities and to a range of other local authority and voluntary sector providers: *'They are all local people themselves, with lived experience, skilful at engaging people, meeting and facilitating things in the community and working with local people. So they've got their pulse on what's going on.'*

### Communications

- Community engagement meetings run 10 times a year and typically involve 50 to 60 local people each time. Topics discussed vary; they respond to what the community decides is important at that time.
- Members of the community are actively encouraged to air opinions at any of the facilities AVCT runs: *'We're trying to ensure that all our staff can signpost people [i.e. guide people as to the best way of getting their voice heard]. We put tea and coffee on and nice breakfast. We'll have a speaker and set an agenda, or we take ideas for the agenda – this is where we see some of the most powerful initiatives.'*
- Social media is a platform for general communication, as well as a mechanism for collecting information from the community to guide the implementation of services offered, for example: *'Our sports manager is particularly active/keen – he will ask for community responses on Twitter, getting direct feedback e.g. on timings of classes, he used this approach to work out how to get mums/parents with kids in prams using treadmills!'*
- AVCT actively encourages feedback in an evolving way: *'We're proactive in how we stay accountable – using questionnaires; social activities – asking what activities the community wants'*. There is a more informal comment wall, which can also be used to provoke discussions.
- Staff have a presence at local social events, including community carnivals and 'Dine and Debate' evenings, which bring them in direct contact with members of the community enabling them to discuss current issues in a relaxed setting.