

## The Vital Role of Leagues of Friends in supporting Community Hospitals



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There can be few Community Hospitals that have not benefitted from the support of their own hospital Friends organisation. Not only have they provided vital equipment and new services, funded training, essential maintenance, and improvements, but have frequently been responsible for fighting threats of down-sizing or closure.

Victoria Hospital, Wimborne has been fortunate to have an active Friends organisation since 1935 initially providing small contributions to patients' comfort but as the NHS reforms took hold in 1990's projects became larger in scale. Supported by the local community and by working in partnership with local healthcare providers the Friends of Wimborne Hospital (FVHW) have provided approximately 80% of capital investment. Over the years many thousands of pounds have been spent on equipment assisting development of cardiology, ophthalmology, endoscopy, and ultrasound. Income is derived from legacies, subscriptions, events, and donations, and from a charity shop in the centre of the town.

Wimborne Hospital lies at the heart of the community is much loved by residents, and the services greatly appreciated, and staff highly regarded for the work they do. This involvement has brought invaluable sustained community support. The Friends played a critical role during the COVID-19 pandemic supplying visors and scrubs, and provided a shower unit for staff use.

VHW is run by Dorset HealthCare Trust whose engagement strategy is to work with and through stakeholders such as the Friends who sit on the hospital Clinical Advisory Group. This partnership is pursuing the development of 'Community Hubs' and other changes to service models which have led to greater integration between community and acute hospital service providers. Currently the Friends are funding the redevelopment and modernisation of Physiotherapy, X-ray, and MIU at a cost of £2.7 M.

The Friends should be a registered charity established following the Charity Commission guidelines. There should be a clearly written constitution with business conducted and managed by a committee of Trustees. The key powers should include being able to :

- Supplement the services provided for health, welfare and comfort of all patients at the hospital and other persons in the community by provision of facilities, buildings, equipment and staff (both paid and voluntary)
- Provide or procure the provision of the education and training of hospital staff
- Recruit and to assist in the recruitment of voluntary workers in and for the hospital or for any activity of the Friends
- Promote, encourage, foster and maintain public interest in and support for the hospital or the Friends
- Raise funds

The security of funds is the Trustees' top priority. Financial arrangements and the investment portfolio are kept under close review by a Finance Sub-committee with external auditing on an annual basis.

The establishment of media contact is increasingly important and is provided by traditional means by a twice-yearly printed newsletter circulated to members, GPs' surgeries, information centres and library. Advertisements for fund-raising events is done through the Friends' charity shop. A well-designed website and Facebook page are increasingly effective in the maintenance and recruitment of members.

Regular contact with other Community Hospitals within Dorset has proved a helpful resource and achieves collective impact when seeking to contribute to Trust strategic planning. For many years the Friends have funded CHA membership. This has provided access to an invaluable national network sharing good practice and promoting innovations and ideas. Finally, there is do doubt that VHW would be a shadow of its present size and significance without the Friends input. Their support of Community Hospitals is as vital now as it has ever been. The NHS which marks its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary in July is presently struggling to fulfil its original role. Any help or support for your own Community Hospital will be essential in the changing landscape of future healthcare.