



Scoping the future of the Voluntary and Community Sector

Summary of discussions held

13 May 2020

Attended by 29 people from across the voluntary and community sector. Below represents comments made by attendees at the meeting.

Issues within the community

Young People

- Lack of access to education whilst at home and concerns over lack of engagement from schools with reports of some young people only receiving emails. No motivation to participate in home schooling.
- Concerns that young people who are homeless are being overlooked. Also for some there appear to be no engagement in this area from authorities; normally there would be contact with a social worker/youth workers or youth offending teams, but this seems to have stopped.
- Services targeting youth who are part of gangs/crime have not been available during lockdown. Also, young people gathering together during lockdown and not engaged in activities
- Some young people are missing out on online activities in families with financial issues that can't afford internet access

Mental Health and Wellbeing

- Growing concerns over people with drug issues, homelessness and general increasing anxiety amongst residents.
- Not everyone connects easily with online support as a way to relieve mental pressure and anxiety.

Social Isolation

- The situation has led to families who were never seen as socially isolated previously, slipping into the isolated category.
- People dying alone in council properties and due to issues of council confidentiality processes, neighbours being unable to share details that can assist the council in identifying next of kin. Though not a trend it is worrying in terms of hampering the council to reach the next of kin.

- There is increased fragmentation and isolation of disabled people which is much worse now than pre-Covid-19; groups are finding it more difficult to reach them.
- Disabled people have emotional and psychological needs more than ever now that they are in isolation. They may have difficulties setting up internet and using tech. Many don't have families or friends to help.

Digital access/divide

- Assumptions are being made about people having digital access when this is not the case, as there are many which do not have access to the internet.
- It is difficult to work with a range of ages and particularly those elderly people which don't have internet access, so can't join online events. There are elderly clients whose sight and hearing are compromised, so having a realistic opportunity to be involved in support-planning via these methods is not possible.
- There is a particular issue for families with several children who are trying to home-school with only one smart device or no device.
- People do not know how to use digital devices e.g. to set up Zoom calls.

Domestic Violence

- Some alarming news about domestic abuse in the BAME communities. This is treble problematic for some for whom English is not a spoken language, compounded by VCS offices being closed which leaves no safe space to meet.
- There are cases of violence being perpetrated by young adults in households, this leaves numerous parents in a dangerous place, but unable to leave the home.

Worklessness

- Worklessness will continue to grow, coupled with increasing housing issues

Access/barriers to food supply

- There is an Increased demand for food – both from food banks and groceries?
- Language and literacy barriers make it difficult to access emergency services (including U65 food referral system “three pages long; asks a lot of questions; only in English”)
- Eligibility is another barrier - some people have been classified as ‘Shielding’ but have not yet been contacted by the government and are therefore falling through the cracks.
- Need for PPE for staff working within food provision – the Council has provided some, but not enough and so VSOs are having to pay for more PPE themselves.
- People with care packages reporting issues with reductions in allotted time for carers to provide support in the home, as much of their time is used up queuing for food on their behalf.

How VCOs are adapting?

- Within the youth sector they are trying to organise youth workers to work with young people on the streets who have been forgotten.
- Many are/have created online support e.g. reading projects.
- Some have received small grants to develop online support sessions.
- Using the opportunity to engage with clients in 'future visioning' work.
- Working collaboratively with the council to address needs as they arise

Challenges facing VCOs

Operations

- There are infrastructure issues caused by remote working such as having a Wi-Fi phone system linked to the office phone lines. Plus the added costs of running activities on zoom. This means paying for more devices for staff and internet costs
- If organisations are renting out space, they are affected if tenants (e.g. artists/social entrepreneurs) can no longer earn income through their activities, or access funding, and are not in a position to pay rent.
- The issue of not getting into the office complicates dealing with cases where client files are stored safely but cannot be accessed.
- Organisations are not geared up for social distancing or staff travelling in safely.
- Organisations are depending heavily on staff who are working extra harder and longer hours without financial recompense. How long can this continue longer term?
- There is a need for designing/adopting/integrating new policies in response to Covid-19 such as returning to work safely.

Volunteers

- Whilst there is a surge in the number of people signing up to volunteer, placing them within an organisation is not always easy or straightforward.
- Need to consider how to help organisations to bring in/onboard volunteers, whilst also managing volunteers online whilst working from home.

Funding

- Availability of funding will be a growing issue. There is very likely to be major funding gaps for organisations going forward.
- For a long time, the message from government has been for charities to diversify their income, but those who rely on generating income are now the ones that are struggling the most.
- Current funding opportunities are for the immediate response to the virus but organisations are now thinking longer term but funding opportunities not there

Communications

- Forms of communication such as posters and leaflets are less effective now as there are fewer people around.

Covid-19 and staff wellbeing

- Concerns over safety of staff longer-term if the virus has a lasting effect and/or infection rates increase and lockdown is re-introduced.
- Mental health concerns for staff adapting as this is a difficult time for everyone, added to the additional demands of service users who may themselves have mental health issues.

PPE

- Organisations to deliver social distancing services but need access to more PPE.

Solutions

- Organisations need to be working more in partnerships. This will be vital as demand for services increase and funding decreases.
- Larger organisations need to help smaller organisations, supporting them through working more collaboratively.
- There needs to be a wide scale programme of providing digital devices for people in need.
- There needs to be more training for people on how to use technology.
- Need to find solutions to reach people who don't engage with VCS services but need support, improving links with existing outreach services.
- Organisations could work together to purchase PPE in bulk.
- Share links to an umbrella body/KCSC where Covid-19 policy templates and tools can be accessed.

Longer term solutions

- The VCS needs to work out how it can best position itself to support the emerging needs not just now but for the longer term.
- Need to gather and collate community insights on what Covid-19 has shown that people want for a more secure and happier future and use this to help steer the sector response.
- Organisations need to develop longer-term strategies – thinking of how to transition back to some of the pre-COVID programmes as well as adapt to new services.
- Voluntary sector and local government relationships are shifting positively, Covid-19 response has shown the council to see the VCS as partners with insights that are

valuable". Plus recognition on how the VCS and the community has been responding, we need to utilise this.

- Need to think about longer term funding opportunities which seek to deliver system change.

Conclusion

As lockdown eases, some of these issues may be resolved but it is clear that many of the issues raised will require a strategic approach alongside immediate practical solutions. KCSC will continue to pull information together through meetings and a sector survey to help inform future decisions on local priorities and plans.