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INNOVATION AND ENTERPRISE ACROSS THE SOCIAL ECONOMY IN RECOVERY FROM COVID-19

FINAL REPORT

Report for the West Midlands Combined Authority

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THE UNIVERSITY OF OPPORTUNITY

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Executive Summary

Innovation and Enterprise in the Social Economy in the West Midlands

The COVID-19 pandemic has severely impacted the West Midlands from a health and wellbeing, and an economic standpoint.

The region's civic leaders have responded to this landscape by submitting the £3.2bn "Recharge the West Midlands" investment case to government in June, which outlines a three year plan for recovery, as well as "levelling up the West Midlands: our roadmap to community recovery and prospectus to government" which outlines 41 examples of good practice, 27 shared ambitions for recovery, 29 asks of government and 15 initial areas for future collaboration. Of the asks of government, over £2bn of these were set out in the WMCA *Recharge the West Midlands prospectus* for transport, affordable housing and skills programmes and these are repeated here. A further £203m is requested for programmes of work directly associated with community recovery on issues such as digital inclusion, radical health prevention and access to green spaces.

The West Midlands has also seen an incredible response from mutual aid, faith and community groups, neighbourhood groups and the social economy and this report focuses on the response and experiences of this broad and diverse sector. Without their contribution to the collective and urgent response to the crisis, both in its initial stages and on into the 'new normal', the health and economic situation would have been far worse, and the impact on public finances more severe. The key question guiding our research was: *How has civil society and the social economy responded to the crisis and what needs to be taken forward or further developed as we move into a 'new normal' way of working?*

This report brings together the learning and insight gained from a review of the civil society and social economy response across the West Midlands Combined Authority area, based on engagement with frontline organisations and strategic stakeholders carried out in August-September 2020. We present a set of detailed case studies that highlight innovation, enterprise and flexibility. Our framework draws attention to the diversity and timeliness of the civil society and social economy response, pointing the way to how public agencies, WMCA and their partners can best support the sector in the future.

Key Findings

A standout finding from the research was the importance of rapid collaboration on mutual terms between community-focused civil society and social economy organisations and public agencies. Our interviews and case studies all highlight the urgency and rapidity with which the sector responded in a spirit of 'getting things done' was key to providing effective support.

Red tape and formality was suspended, existing partnerships and good relationships were strengthened, power disparities were reduced, and new flexible ways of working were

adopted some of which were online. However the case studies consistently highlighted digital divides and in/exclusion, the stark way in which the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted underlying inequalities, and hence the important role for the sector in speaking out. We briefly summarise the headline findings here, while the full detail is provided in Chapter 6 of the report.

Theme 1: Issues that surfaced in the immediate response to COVID-19:
- Agility and urgency of the response, and the need for flexibility
- Civil society highlighting inequalities and the impact of poverty
- Civil society identifying vulnerable individuals and communities

Theme 2: Adapting services in response to COVID-19
- Digital inclusion and exclusion
- Tensions between COVID-19 regulations and face to face support
- Wellbeing and mental health in communities and sector workforce
- Design of COVID-19 specific services

Theme 3: Cross-sector, system, and longer-term policy implications
- Multi-organisational collaboration and partnerships
- Funding COVID-19 specific services and redirecting funding
- Locking in the learning: sustaining trust and local knowledge
- The uncertain recovery and anxiety about the future.

The learning from the research underpins a set of key recommendations, which were co-developed with the sector at an online engagement event in September 2020.

Case Studies of innovation and enterprise
The report contains twelve detailed case studies which highlight the urgent and flexible responses, and innovation and learning that emerged in the response to COVID-19. For instance:
- **Hope Community** in Wolverhampton created Lockdown Lunches and Grow Your Own At Home, in the immediate weeks of the crisis, providing hot meals for the elderly, culturally-sensitive food and advice to the area's ethnically diverse community, as well as a social connection and wellbeing check-in and support.
- **Holy Trinity Church, Smethwick** in Sandwell created the Faithful Friends multi-faith network using social media to provide a space for community engagement. This existing work and strong relationships facilitated rapid mobilisation in response to COVID-19 and excellent partnership working with Sandwell Public Health to share key health messages and support the vulnerable.
- **The Active Wellbeing Society** in Birmingham rapidly built a business plan for a £600,000 contract with Fareshare, with food to be distributed by TAWS and the #BrumTogether partnership. The Birmingham depot reached over 21,000 people every week, reflecting an unprecedented level of coordination between faith, voluntary and community organisations in the city.

- **Hope for the Community CIC** in Coventry delivered its services face to face prior to the pandemic. In March 2020 it rapidly found solutions to help their partners meet the needs of the vulnerable groups they support – working with academic experts to include COVID-19 related resources; training new facilitators and ensuring the H4C technology platform could deliver quality courses.

The detailed case studies can be found in Chapter 5 and we highlight a wide range of innovations that were surfaced in our wider conversations and interviews across the region.

Recommendations

The findings highlight some major challenges for the sector and for public agencies, and thus our recommendations focus on how the WMCA and its partners can harness the learning from this crucial period and are based on the principle of 'building back better':

Theme One: *The way we work* – collaboration and beyond

In order to empower leaders from across civil society and the social economy, we recommend the WMCA play a role in supporting:

- Opportunities for leaders from within civil society and the social economy to meet, discuss and share information in a spirit of collaboration
- Affordable and accessible opportunities for leaders from across civil society and the social economy to further develop their skills
- An assumption that the civil society and social economy sector is an equal partner
- Commissioning frameworks (at a national, regional and local level) that encourage collaboration, rather than drive competition;

Theme Two: *The way we deliver* in a COVID-19 world

In recognition of the different but equally valuable contributions of the range of organisations across civil society and the social economy, delivering at different times, to different people, we recommend:

- Creating opportunities for VCSFE groups to build on recent experiences and energy and identify how organisations can continue to work together and support one another
- Investment in community development that builds on the learning from Covid19 – creating more connected communities that are then well placed to respond in future
- Further development and expansion of the citizens panel to ensure voices of those from marginalised groups are included
- Building on the 2017 *Mayor and Faith Action Plan*, to learn the lessons arising from the COVID crisis and the wider voluntary and community sector response
- A regional Digital Inclusion strategy, which draws from the evidence from this research about the complexity of digital inclusion for marginalised communities

Theme three: *The way we prepare*

In recognition of the financial impact of the crisis and the creative responses of individual organisations, but also the climate of considerable uncertainty and anxiety facing civil society organisations, we recommend:

- Introducing a Regional Stabilisation Fund for civil society and the social economy to support recovery and ensure work can continue
- WMCA work with the sector to facilitate shared learning, training and capacity building amongst organisations, and develop a strategic relationship with well-being providers
- Exploring the development of a strategy for volunteering and social action, bringing VCS infrastructure organisations into a dialogue about how this can best be developed and supported.
- Connect the social economy with the private sector to co-produce solutions to social inequalities highlighted during the pandemic, focusing on the anticipated economic and social impact

The full recommendations can be found in Chapter 7, where we outline how these are addressed more specifically to different audiences: WMCA and its partners, and for the civil society and social economy sector in the West Midlands.

January 2021

Acknowledgements

1. Introduction

The West Midlands has been the hardest hit region outside London in terms of COVID-19 cases and deaths, and many reports indicate that it will suffer the worst economic and social impact in the coming months and years.

The Covid-19 global pandemic and associated economic and social lockdown has brought profound impacts on global and national economies with far reaching consequences for regions, communities and individuals.

In that context the West Midlands has seen an incredible response from mutual aid, faith and community groups, neighbourhood groups and the social economy. From food distribution networks for those shielding to the provision of ICT equipment to facilitate home-schooling, the response has been incredible.

WMCA's Public Service Reform Directorate wanted to develop a deeper understanding of the innovation and enterprise shown by the social economy in response to the pandemic, so as to ensure that the value of that response and the resilience of neighbourhoods that has been built can be harnessed for the long term.

The research commissioned and presented in this report is intended to:

Explore good practice across the region set within an analytical framework;

- Identify a number of case studies showing different types of response and action;

- Inform how the WMCA could learn from that practice and, in particular, the implications it might have for public agencies;

- Set out short to medium term and recovery actions that should be taken as we move forward to the 'new normal' of a fairer, greener and healthier West Midlands.

The research addresses the following key question:

How has civil society and the social economy responded to the crisis and what needs to be taken forward or further developed as we move into a 'new normal' way of working?

The research

The Institute for Community Research and Development (ICRD: University of Wolverhampton), BVSC, and the Centre for Trust, Peace, and Social Relations (Coventry University) undertook the research in four stages:

- Stage one: Rapid evidence review

- We conducted a rapid review of existing national and regional reports and briefings, and presented this in an interim report, which also included an extensive annotated bibliography of key published sources of relevance. Key findings from the review are presented in this report. Stage two: Evidence gathering and case studies of 'innovation, enterprise and flexibility'

We collected evidence through direct approaches and calls for evidence from West Midlands based organisations and stakeholders. We conducted a series of over 30 telephone interviews, and received evidence and briefings by email. We identified 12 case studies as exemplars of 'innovation, enterprise and flexibility'

- Stage three: Surfacing and co-produced synthesis of ideas for reconfiguration and rebuilding

We conducted a thematic analysis of the evidence, allowing for a rapid, emerging understanding of key trends and promising ideas and practice.

- Stage four: Learning, recommendations and short to medium term and recovery

We convened a working group on 9th September 2020. This working group included over 30 representatives from key organisations and stakeholders, the research team, plus representatives from the WMCA. The working group shared, tested, and refined the key learning and co-developed the recommendations.

A more detailed overview of the study methodology is provided at Appendix A. We will include here the call for evidence, the interview topic guide, and a list of participants, if useful for WMCA.

# 2. A framework to understand the civil society and social economy response

Our framework adopts Whittaker's well-established categorisation of civil society responses to crisis, but builds on it by adding a temporal dimension (see Whittaker, 2015). Writing more specifically in relation to COVID-19, Rob Macmillan has pointed out that there has been a noticeable phased response to the crisis: informal community groups have emerged as 'first responders' when traditional approaches have been "delayed, insufficient or inappropriate" (Macmillan et al., 2020). We have also seen that in some instances, larger established/formal voluntary sector organisations, *and* parts of the public sector, were perceived by communities as slow to respond.

Whittaker suggests that four kinds of organisational response are discernible:

- **Established organisations** undertaking existing routine work - these would include public sector and emergency services;

- **Expanding organisations**, carrying out their usual tasks in new ways/structures to meet demand - for instance larger voluntary organisations;

- **Extending organisations**, taking on new roles - particularly places of worship, food banks, advice services;

- **Emergent organisations**, new groups/structures carrying out new tasks - this would certainly include the broad range of MAGs, micro-volunteering and hyper-local community responses.

These broad types of organisations can be recognised as carrying out their activity at heightened intensity over different timescales, resulting in the following model in Figure 1.

Figure One: A framework to understand the phasing and intensity of response of the social economy sector
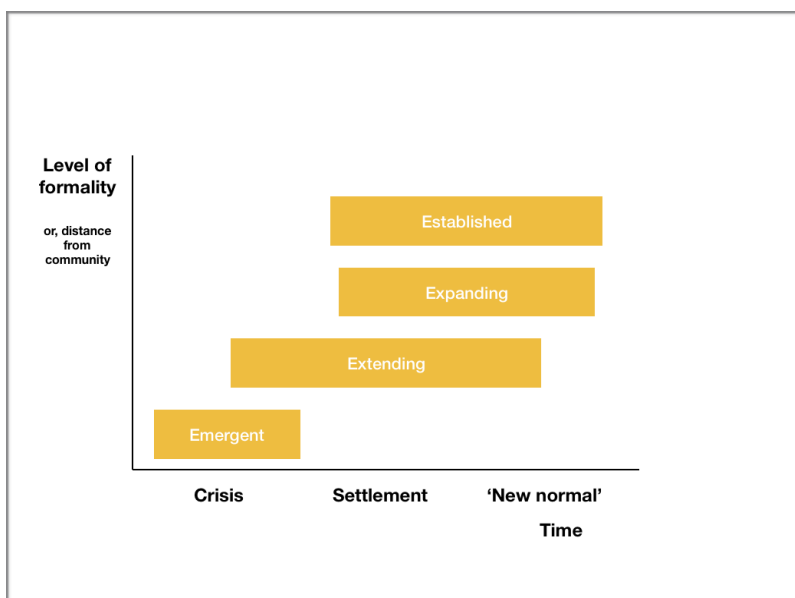
In proposing this framework it is firstly important to note the similarities with Collaborate CIC's framework (see companion Systems report) which also highlights that key innovation and adaptation occurred at certain times following the crisis. Both aim to highlight that learning needs to be captured from different phases of the response, from different parts of the 'system' (or in our case the entire 'ecosystem' of civil society and the social economy) and finally, both offer an insight into which activities and subsequent learning can be 'parked', and which are ongoing.

The potential of this framework is to shape how public agencies learn from, adapt to, and take forward the learning from a very complex (and still evolving) reality.

Our framework helps us think about the diversity of the sector and the range of responses:

It is crucial to recognise that much of the activity in civil society and the social sector was autonomous or semi-autonomous from more formal public sector activity and even to a large extent the sphere of its policy influence. Thus the learning is that the role for public policy is to *facilitate and enhance*, rather than attempt to directly *shape and control* (see also Wyler, 2020). A linked insight of the framework is highlighting the dynamic nature of the response to the crisis, and suggests that thinking in this way will help public agencies to respond better to future crises.

Recognition of different strengths of response over time is not a judgement on the value of different types of organisation or activity. For instance, we think mutual aid groups have a clear lifespan, and that needs to be more widely understood. All the accounts we've heard of mutual aid groups is that they emerged spontaneously, captured genuine community spirit, and were extremely busy for several weeks before other systems gradually adapted (e.g. supermarkets, pharmacies, GP surgeries), following which they were increasingly quiet. The framework provides a way of capturing the intensity of activity, and when these responses are most salient.

Hyper local responses will emerge spontaneously in future regardless of public policy. They may not look exactly the same, this is where 'resilience' and 'resourcefulness' is key, see section 3 below, therefore the challenge and recommendation for public agencies is not necessarily to 'harness' this (that might not work, and could be counter-productive), but to understand that this activity will likely emerge and to sustain it, possibly fund it, and facilitate it. And certainly not stifle it with bureaucracy and systems (a key message from the literature summarised in section 3).

Ultimately we hope this framework will provide the WMCA and their partners with a way to understand how to harness and ideally support future activity in response to future pandemic or crisis, with the insight that the social economy will tend to respond in this way, and thus how it can be better facilitated and supported. A further consideration is how the conditions for this response are best facilitated.

3. A summary of current research: impact on the sector and challenges for recovery

We reviewed reports, briefings, and presentations about the civil society and social economy response to Covid-19 nationally and locally. What is apparent is that these tend to be at a more general level, taking in a wider geography, with a focus on particular themes or policy areas. We have concentrated on summarizing key points here, and drawing out lessons from this wider literature where possible (summarised in section 4). A more comprehensive summary of the reports and documents we have accessed is provided in Appendix B.

Rapid and agile community-based responses

There is no doubting the incredible scale of the local community-based response to the crisis: nationally over 4000 mutual aid groups emerged almost overnight. These registered groups were in addition to thousands of existing community associations and local charities and social enterprises, as well as spontaneous neighbourly activity aided by Facebook groups, WhatsApp groups etc. As Steve Wyler (Locality, 2020) puts it: "I have seen how, at their best, community efforts can make a vital difference to a national crisis response, ameliorating some of the worst impacts, especially among the poorest and the most vulnerable, and helping people rediscover their common humanity".

Research has recognised that informal and community responses were at the forefront of the response (VAS, 2020). Locally, BVSC and BCC recognised that the community-led response was immediate, based on proactive engagement of the VCS, the strong existing social capital in Birmingham and was best delivered when not over-managed. There was also a willingness to challenge the system and a desire to continue to work together to tackle the difficult issues such as food security, PPE, and commissioning. The children's partnership provided funding for vulnerable groups and families, building on existing strong LA-VCS partnerships; but there were also challenges to "historic public sector behaviour" towards the VCS, and this included challenges from the established organisations.

Steve Wyler of Locality was struck by the crucial importance of relationships and multi-directional collaboration within this response. It's not just that it was spontaneous and without top-down direction: "when I have spoken to people immersed in the community responses, I have been struck by the significance of local relationships between residents and also between organisations and with public and private sectors as well. And how valuable these are proving in the current crisis" (Wyler, 2020). This seems to have been particularly the case where relationships have been consistently built and reinforced over time, and a culture of seeking out strengths and encouraging participation has been created. The existence of trust and confidence across the social economy and public sector partners has been seen as critical to successful responses at a locality level.

However, the limitations of community-based response has also been highlighted by many. In the work supported by Local Trust, the team caution that "Informal responses have been useful but not able to rise to the scale of the pandemic; access to additional funding has enhanced the ability of the informal responses; pre-existing networks have been beneficial to the responses." (Briefing 1). And in a follow up report, they suggest that "the idea that a community can withstand shocks if it is 'resilient' does not recognise how communities are nested within wider power structures that largely shape their fate" (Ref, Briefing 4). This chimes with the messages emerging from the Birmingham research, which notes the disproportionate impact that COVID-19 has had on BAME communities; and questions whether the renewed level of connectivity can be sustained after the initial crisis phase has passed.

Volunteering, mutualism and social action

As Ellis-Paine (2020) observes: "The contribution of volunteers in the response to Covid19 has rightly received considerable attention: this has highlighted their role both in formal responses through initiatives such as NHS Responders and organisations such as St John Ambulance, but also – and arguably more significantly – through more informal, local community based responses: "What is new is the level of attention and value being placed on volunteering as an expression of community, mutualism, solidarity and care" (pg 6).

Ellis-Paine (2020) offers some caution to an un-challenged view of volunteering within Covid19. Whilst acknowledging and celebrating the crucial part played by 'volunteers' in response to the crisis (with a reported 1 in 5 citizens stepping forward to volunteer) Ellis-Paine reminds us that many more have had to stop (e.g. those needing to shield) and that for those individuals there has been a "loss of role identity, social interaction and well-being." (Pg 3). She also makes two further important observations; firstly, those who have been able to volunteer during the crisis have, in the main, been able to do so because of the human, social and cultural capital that they possess. Thus, whilst volunteering can be seen to address social inequalities, it can also exacerbate them. This is also reinforced by the fact that 'furlough' was vital to the Mutual Aid response (Tiratelli and Kaye, 2020) and that, almost by definition, mutual aid is an 'in-group' rather than an 'intra-group' phenomenon.

Secondly, there are questions as to whether those who have 'stepped forward' will continue to volunteer as we move forward, and whether those who have been forced to stop will return. As she observes, this "feels particularly pertinent in the current crisis, which is both widespread and long term" (Pg 3).

Building on this idea of mutualism and a redefining of traditional perceptions of volunteering, Goss (July, 2020) asserts that 'self-organising' as we have seen in the Mutual Aid movement has the additional intrinsic benefits of offering "dignity, a space for self-realisation, and an ability to give meaning to our lives that receiving state service does not" (Pg 11).

Ellis-Paine (2020) observes that in recent years, volunteering has seen a shift to more 'instrumental' and episodic activity. However, during Covid-19 there has been a return to collective forms which have been driven by "necessity, obligation combined with solidarity and proximity". One challenge has been that supply (of volunteers) has far outstripped demand and this has been exacerbated by a long standing paradox emerging from what volunteers can/should and cannot/should not do: "The paradox recognises the conflicting pressures on official disaster responders; on the one hand there is pressure to individual volunteers, as help is needed and is readily available, but on the other hand concerns about risk and capacity to manage volunteers lead to pressures to exclude" (pg 3).

Tiratelli & Kaye also pick up this theme; pointing to the challenge of 'managing informality, waning enthusiasm and internal tensions' experienced by the Mutual Aid Groups they interviewed. As Ellis further observes, there is a danger that much of the good will that emerged following national calls for volunteering (such as that promoted by the national GoodSam initiative) has left people feeling disillusioned when their response has not been followed up on. "What does seem clear is that far more people put themselves forward to volunteer than were actually deployed; that the supply of volunteers has outstripped demand, at least within formal, organisational volunteering roles" (Ellis-Paine, 2020, Pg 3). Similarly, Tiratelli & Kaye (2020) highlighted the challenge of maintaining energy within the Mutual Aid Groups, particularly as the crisis continues. This also mirrors a shifting perception which began as being 'all in it together' and is now focused on the pre-existing inequalities that have been brought sharply into focus

'Traditional' voluntary sector under stress?

Quite early in lockdown it became clear that many charities were worried about the impact on their survival, with key voices raising the alarm, reflected in the #nevermoreneeded campaign on Twitter. In the religion or belief group context, for example, the Muslim Charities Forum (2020, p. 28) highlighted that: "If charities on the frontline have had to use up their reserves in dealing with the initial phase of lockdown, some may struggle to serve their communities as effectively in future lockdowns". Emerging findings from BVSC's State of the Sector survey (due to be published in November 2020) has found that 1 in 4 organisations considered their survival to be in doubt.

The pressing challenges facing voluntary sector organisations was recognised by the HoC Digital, Culture, Media and Sports Committee which noted that the contribution of charities to respond to the needs of the most vulnerable is now more critical than ever, but some are fighting for survival with traditional sources of funding drying up - "smaller charities are at imminent risk of closure if adequate support is not provided". They also noted that social distancing is making delivering services harder and more costly, and reserves are being run down. The committee called for a comprehensive stabilisation fund.

Rob Macmillan (2020) identifies a three-dimensional challenge facing charities: resourcing, operation and demand. Early research has indicated that the trading income for many

charities has collapsed meaning that charities are expecting an average reduction in income of 31% (Institute of Fundraising et al, 2020). At the same time, 9 out of 10 charities expect Covid19 to have a negative impact on being able to achieve their charitable objectives. Finally, demand has intensified and become more complex.

Macmillan also notes that staff-led activity and operations have been heavily affected by lockdown and shielding. We also note that there are inequalities within the sector, for instance The Independent reported in May that 9 in 10 BAME-led VCSFE organisations were at risk of closure with many not in a position to access relief funding. And in relation to the religion or belief groups the Muslim Charities Forum (2020, p. 28) noted that: "only 16% of Muslim led local charities have so far received institutional funding for their COVID-19 response". In relation to Christian faith-based organizations, Coventry University's Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations has been funded by the British Academy to research "The Organisational, Financial and Human Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on the Christian Faith-Based Organization Service Sector in Great Britain" (https://www.coventry.ac.uk/fbo-covid-research) on which it will be reporting in Spring 2021.

IVAR have highlighted in more detail several key issues: The uncertainty of future funding (impact on economy and knock on impact on future funding; having capacity to write new bids and also difficult when future so uncertain); the issue of staff welfare and morale (burnout, fear and fatigue; building in self-care, developing new ways to communicate) and the balancing of opportunities and limitations of virtual service provision (understanding the potential opportunities but balancing this with lack of therapeutic qualities of online support and difficulties in engaging new beneficiaries).

In their work with charity leaders IVAR have also drawn attention to feelings of professional isolation, having to face up to hard decisions with long-term implications, the need to manage the 'split views' amongst staff about returning to work; increasingly issues also about furloughing, redundancy and restructure, or reducing wages.

This somewhat pessimistic view must be countered with the hugely positive role the voluntary sector has played in providing crucial social infrastructure and coordination, and a link to the wider public sector system. A good example of the 'formal' voluntary sector playing a crucial role in creating and sustaining social infrastructure in the response to COVID is the integrated response in Birmingham.

Going into the crisis, Birmingham already had a Constituency approach with established partnerships of local voluntary and community organisations and the Council in the different neighbourhood areas through the 'Neighbourhood Network Scheme' (NNS). The City Council approached this apparatus with a request for help at the end of March, and provided Covid Priority grants to be distributed by the NNS leads. The work focused on coordinating volunteers, food delivery and shopping, and support for those suffering from loneliness and isolation. The exact focus varied between the different neighbourhoods depending on local assets, conditions and needs. This activity sat alongside the C19 Brum

Partnership which consisted of thematic leads from the sector in areas such as homelessness, domestic violence and mental health.

Taking forward the learning: Challenges for policy and policymakers

A consideration of timing and longevity of response has been found to be very important in capturing the learning from particularly community-based mutual aid activity. NLGN for instance emphasised that the response was marked by hyper-local spontaneous efforts of communities. They suggest we continue to highlight how these efforts differ from traditional 'helper and helped' relationships (prevalent in traditional public services and charities) – rather they obey "deeper obligations of mutualism". The big question they raise is, is this only available in a crisis? In order to sustain - or repeat this in future - they suggest that the learning captures that mutual aid groups have been crucial to Covid19 response, that they illustrate wider potential of community power, and that the brokering response of local government is crucial. Finally, to remember that inequalities between communities are likely to be exacerbated arising where social capital is more developed, or working age people have more time (for instance in relation to the phenomenon of 'furlough-teering').

The 7th IVAR briefing focuses particularly on leadership in the social sector: "leaders continue to think and act with speed and flexibility in response to the challenges being thrown at them" (Pg. 4). This includes: finding new ways to listen to, and consult with beneficiaries; reviewing organisational strategy (shifting business models, exploring opportunities to diversify…..and considering things like mergers); Exploring collaborations and partnerships; looking at ways to cover core costs (liquidising assets etc.) and recruiting/training new volunteers (Pg. 5).

Wyler also considers more strategic issues, posing 4 big questions: Beyond the crisis – what kind of leadership will prevail (we have seen increased command and control as time has gone on, compared to the early distributed leadership of the community response). Will the relationship with the state change? Will the state come to expect more of citizens? Will they help to create conditions for people to contribute? Who will bear brunt of disaster – inequality, financial impact etc.? Can we continue to take community for granted?

On a rather different note, Sue Goss writing for Compass (July 2020), suggests we need to move away from the 'machine mind' to a 'garden mind' – to thinking about society as eco-systems that are highly interdependent and connected – and within this you can reconceptualise the role of the state. Goss argue sthat there is a need for a resourceful, powerful state that is able to redistribute wealth and organise resources and prevent harm BUT we need to see them as caretakers/gardeners rather than machines. Her paper ends with a call to build collaborative leadership and systems leaders, on the basis that distributed leadership and power is more democratic and more resilient. There is also a need to be radical, and to create disturbance.

As noted above, the Local Trust research initiative highlighted how 'resilience' at the community level can only go so far. Important work in the Local Trust series (Briefing 2) suggests that the idea of 'resilience' implies coping with or managing the impacts of external shocks, it also suggests that the community 'lacks' something and in a crisis is given responsibility without extra resources. In contrast, the idea of resourcefulness suggests a more pro-active capacity to develop creative solutions, and to challenge wider structural causes of local inequalities. The Cabinet Office (2019) 'Community Resilience Development Framework' – introduced the policy language of 'prepare, respond, recover' (pg. 2). However the proposed alternative model of resourcefulness "promotes [the] idea that communities have the capacity to engage in dialogue, develop alternative agenda and challenge existing power relations" (pg. 2) – ideally in a way that builds into an ongoing process.

Understandably, it is early days for distilling learning from the pandemic and crisis response. Nevertheless, in considering its recommendations for public agencies, the Communities vs Coronavirus report from NLGN (July 2020) suggests that Councils should play a facilitating role as MAGs evolve (with creativity, trust, and above all a clear understanding of the value of MAGs); the creation of a community support financial package for local government to invest in community development; and promote employment policy and practice that supports flexible working, giving working-age people more time to volunteer (Pgs. 8-9).

The national reports, briefings, and presentations are helpful in understanding what is happening across the country and in developing the analytical framework presented in Section 2 above. We augmented the 'literature review' with the call for evidence and early conversations, to surface the following national themes and lines of enquiry. These have proved very helpful in prompting and shaping conversations, and providing the emerging themes presented at the working group online meeting.

4. Emerging national themes and questions

We drew out the key findings from the rapid overview of the documentary evidence together with our initial analysis of themes emerging from the early conversations and rapid interviews.

The way the sector responded

Emerging challenges

Sector-public relationships
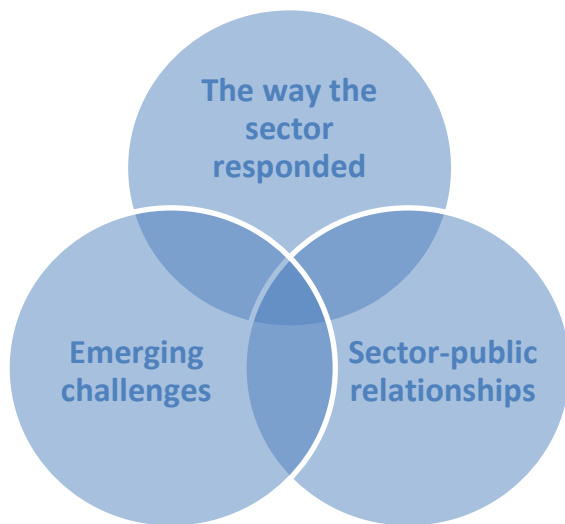
The way civil society and the social economy responded

- **Agile community-led responses**

Immediate community-led responses, mobilised quickly. There may be benefits where this work may then be supported by local authorities, but potential risks if agility is sacrificed to do so. There is learning here about how we can build and facilitate capacity within communities, built sustainable trust and strong networks.

How can we ensure that the 'problem solving' capacity and resourcefulness of communities is developed? How best can we create the conditions for citizens to contribute, and how do we harness the latent social capital and build on social networks and infrastructure and make the most of community assets? How do we create the space for self-organising and the condition for it to flourish?

What has been the role, value and challenges of informal community activity during the crisis, such as through mutual aid support groups?

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Vignette 1

Carriers of Hope, *Coventry CIO was founded in May 2009 to address the unmet needs of asylum seekers, refugees and EU Migrants (primarily Roma people from Eastern Europe).   They are like a recycling scheme. The general public donate their unwanted goods, which they pass on to families in need. During the Coronavirus Pandemic they moved to a home-delivery service and dedicated one work phone to receive requests, publicising this for two weeks before the lock down, as the "Magic Number". A newly formed squad of 23 volunteer delivery drivers began to deliver to homes. They moved away from recycling second-hand goods, to delivering new goods, instead, for the safety of the staff, volunteers and clients. Over 1,200 requests were dealt with by August. This service is now part of a DEFRA project to feed families most affected by Covid but also responding to the need for culturally relevant food by setting a "World Foods' Foodbank" a partnership of Carriers of Hope, St Mark's Church (which is situated directly opposite Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre) and YWAM (Youth With a Mission). This is complimented by the loan of a high-tech hydroponic Garden Tower by Warwick University Medical School to grow herbs and leafy vegetables.*

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- **Expanding and extending organisations**

The formal VCFSE sector was able to quickly and effectively expand and extend their provision to meet emerging need. This involved 'turning to face the crisis' and quickly adapting services, including using on-line platforms for service delivery. The expertise of these established organisations has also been critical in supporting emerging organisations and local communities. The ability of the sector to respond in this way has been supported by more flexible approaches by funders and commissioners in repurposing existing delivery to meet the emerging need.

- **Urgency vs. strategic planning**

Organisational strategy: when there is an emergency, is there time to think strategically? What is the longer term impact/risk of focusing on the emergency response and postponing strategic thinking?

- **Challenging the 'nice-to-have/'soft' rhetoric**

There is a rhetoric and language – most noticeable from the government - that focuses on the 'soft' rather than the 'sharp-edge' work that many organisations are doing. Work in civil society and the social economy is not a 'nice-to-have' but is essential and life-saving work in many areas. The visibility of this contribution is important.

- **Recognising diversity of response**

Whilst there have been some broad emerging trends, community led responses have been different in different regions, cities, towns, villages and neighbourhoods. Existing social infrastructure, levels of deprivation and the existence of pre-Covid19 partnerships built over time appear to have a bearing on how communities and the wider social economy has responded.

We need to acknowledge and consider that different communities and also different demographics within communities (especially with reference to age, ethnicity and religion or belief) are both impacted by and respond to COVID-19 in different ways.

Emerging challenges for the sector, as we move into the 'new normal'

- **Staff welfare and wellbeing**

Staff welfare and wellbeing within civil society and the social economy is already a cause for concern in many areas, and the current ongoing uncertainty surrounding the crisis is likely to exacerbate this, although some of the impact may take some time to emerge.

- **Funding – stability**

As elsewhere in the economy, the VCFSE sector is facing a significant financial challenge. Many organisations have lost significant income as a result of the pandemic and are now facing a very uncertain future and in some cases this will include closure. Given the emerging need amongst some of our most vulnerable citizens, who often rely on the support provided by the sector, this is deeply concerning.

What do we retain the freedom and flexibility that has allowed innovation and agility in response to the crisis? How can policy makers be informed and supported to mobilise resources?

- **Collective voice**

There is much emerging evidence of collective responses/voice, where community-led groups have emerged and/or organisations have come together. This recognises the strength of bringing together voices from a diverse sector, increased collaborative and partnership working and an acknowledgement of the different ways that different parts of civil society can add value.

> **Vignette 2**
>
> ***The Building Bridges*** *Welcome to Coventry web app has been utilised during the COVID-19 crisis to collate all essential information in one place for access by asylum seekers, refugees, migrants and anyone with limited English language skills to demystify COVID-19. This has been updated each morning, and includes what to do if you have symptoms, how to shield vulnerable people, employment rights, educational materials and where to find mental health support.*
>
> *The main benefit of this resource is its 'BrowseAloud' technology. By click the orange circle with a 'B' in, users can choose from a drop-down menu of several languages. The page will then be translated into the chosen language, and people can also listen to this translation aloud. This has enabled us to target 'hard to reach' communities that may face language barriers. It has also been particularly useful in promoting how to stay safe in line with COVID-19 restrictions during Ramadan 2020, a celebration that is usually very social.*
>
> *The app is available here:* https://welcometocoventry.co.uk/

- **Innovation in offer, delivery, approach**

What has been abundantly clear is that community-led responses and the response from the formal VCSFE has been characterised by innovation, agility and flexibility. This has included embracing new ways of working through digital platforms, developing new collaborations, new services and new approaches to service delivery. That said, digital is not the panacea, and there is recognition that vital face to face services must continue. How can we best sustain these new and innovative responses as we move into the next phase of the crisis and beyond.

The wider system perspective and sector-public agency relationships

- **Map changing ecosystems**

What has become clear through the national research is the importance of existing networks (including with funders), connections and partnerships in mobilising and sustaining activity. Furthermore, in some areas the relationship between VCFSE and statutory agencies and local authorities has shifted in response to the pandemic.

There is a need to map these changing/new relationships (ecosystems). The position of civil society and the social economy in the 'new normal' is as yet unclear, but there are positive findings emerging around the role of local authorities as facilitators.

- **Planning for increased demand and ensuring the vulnerable are supported**

As the full economic impact of the pandemic takes hold, the demand for services is likely to increase and it is therefore a priority to ensure the most vulnerable/disadvantaged are supported. Evidence suggests that the immediate focus from the sector was very much on the most vulnerable. There will be significant challenges ahead and there is awareness that this will have a disproportionate impact on certain groups.

Vignette 3

Positive Youth Foundation, The unplugged series involved supporting young people during lockdown to express their creativity by curating a digital exhibition. The Unplugged Series Digital Gallery provides new works by a collective of aspiring Coventry artists aged 13 to 25. They all took part in an eight-week mentoring programme during lockdown, designed to combat the effect of COVID-19 on arts and youth provision in Coventry.

The above themes, distilled from the existing published reports and early conversations, provided further lines of enquiry for the research, particularly the rapid interviews that underpinned the case study completion. In addition to the core research questions outlined at the beginning of this research, we also sought to understand:

- Whether what we see from the national picture has happened in the West Midlands?

- If so, where and how? What can we take forward from this?

- Where does this leave smaller organisations – what has their role been?

The above highlights the pressing need for the current research. Notably, there is limited evidence in the existing research of policy makers including this thinking in recovery plans. The work being done by the WMCA, and how this translates into policy and practice, will present an example of good practice to other regions.

5. Case studies of innovation, enterprise and flexibility

The aim here was to present a number of illuminating case studies highlighting 'innovation, enterprise and flexibility' in order to deepen and contextualise our understanding of good practice in VCFSE responses to the crisis. We drew on the diversity of expertise, sectoral and geographical reach of the team in order to ensure diversity and broad coverage of sub-sector, local authority, community-based, neighbourhood level etc. The case studies particularly set out to explore:

- the evolving nature of 'co-production' – especially in response to food security, care services, NHS volunteers, mutual aid.

- spaces for discussion, deliberation, decision-making, community voice and engagement.

- novel freedoms and flexibilities which have allowed quicker, smarter, or more efficient delivery or support.

- the role of civil society and the social economy in supporting anchor institutions and key workers through the pandemic.

Case studies were selected as we progressed: identified through the call for evidence, through initial conversations, and from the rapid interviews. The team discussed which ones were most promising, paying heed to the need for coverage of the above issues, and where necessary added detail by carrying out further interviews.

In the course of our call for evidence and initial rapid interviews we found so many interesting and striking initiatives that we wanted to draw attention to that we ultimately decided to include twelve cases, as follows:

Case Study 1

Holy Trinity Church, Smethwick and Faithful Friends (Sandwell)
Overview: Holy Trinity Church is situated in Smethwick, Sandwell, an area which has been described in the media as a prime site for Coronavirus cross-infection. A multicultural areas with a large proportion of people involved in faith communities, the church was described to us as representing a "minority faith", with the Gurdwara situated 300 yards away attracting more than 20 times the footfall of the church (10,000 people a week passing through the Gurdwara's doors for worship or food, compared to 500 a week visiting the church and the associated Smethwick foodbank). The church itself historically seated 700, but its capacity has reduced to 140 as the buildings have been redeveloped to accommodate hotdesking for small business ventures (of which there are currently 17) as

well as the foodbank. Prior to the pandemic, the foodbank, staffed by Church employees and volunteers, served on average 30 families; during lockdown this increased to 170.

In the past six months, the church's Covid-19 journey has been multifaceted: existing networks within faith communities have been mobilised, a partnership has been developed with Sandwell Public Health, and key church members have carried out individual-level action. Collectively, these responses represent best practice in maximising community reach and underline the value of pre-existing relationships in cultivating community resilience.

Prior to the pandemic, the church was instrumental in establishing a largely Sandwell-based network, 'Faithful Friends', comprising eight individuals of different religious beliefs. In the past few years, the network has demonstrated innovation in the creation of collaborative social media content, for example, the 'Faithful Friends on Tour' YouTube videos, which are aimed at providing a space for faith community engagement. Andrew Smith, Director of Interfaith Relations at the Church of England Birmingham and a Faithful Friend, emphasised the natural and informal nature of their relationships: "Some people see us as 'the faith leaders', but were just a group of friends".

That the Faithful Friends were integrated and well established in the area enabled the community, including the church, to respond quickly and effectively to the pandemic. As Andrew told us, "*the reason so much stuff has worked is that the relationships already existed*". A key outcome during the pandemic has been a newly developed public sector partnership with Sandwell Public Health. Smethwick-based members of the Faithful Friends liaised with the Public Health Director to establish regular meetings for faith community members, of which 160 attend.

Revd David Gould, the vicar of Holy Trinity Church, highlighted the value of this form of communication: "it's a way of reaching out to a very large part of this community […] There's a very direct line of access". This new space for discussion and deliberation has enabled faith communities to contribute to policy development. For example, at a recent funeral, 30 people were inside the church and 130 outside. It was highlighted to Sandwell Public Health that whilst the church service represented a 'controlled' space, there was a lack of Covid-19 guidance for the public burial that followed. This action exemplifies the church's role in creating new spaces for policy discussion: *"I now have a platform within which to raise questions. It's not a one-way thing where Sandwell Public Health tell us what to do […] I like to think that we're making a public contribution"*.

Lastly, the church's commitment to the pastoral care of its congregation and the wider community has validated its position as a site for meaningful engagement. The church remained open for access to Smethwick foodbank during lockdown, reopened for public services as soon as was allowed and Revd David continued to respond to funeral requests throughout the pandemic. Notably, Revd David described the church's digital outreach to parishioners through phone, email and WhatsApp as "the bare minimum". Rather, he has taken advantage of his status as a 'key worker' to "carry out more [socially distanced] home visits in the last 6 months than I've done in the last 13 years". Using his key worker status as a strategic tool has enabled the church to provide quicker and more efficient delivery of pastoral support to the most vulnerable in the community. The value of this response among the church community was validated by an increase in church attendance when

services resumed; 96 people attended the first service (either in personal or digitally) after lockdown was eased – more than twice its usual reach. Revd David shared his inspiration for maintaining an active role during lockdown, citing examples of church leaders who worked through the Great Plague. In his words,

"I don't think a vicar should leave his post. End of."

The partnership with Sandwell Public Health was developed following a conversation between members of the Faithful Friends. Since many mosques in the area were converted houses and not suitable for social distancing, two members of the Faithful Friends reached out to Sandwell Public Health for their view on outdoor public worship in a park or the graveyard of Holy Trinity Church. Following this initial communication, the Director of Sandwell Public Health requested that a group meet with her to discuss the needs of faith communities during the pandemic. Subsequently, these meetings have continued, illustrating how co-production can be fostered through collaboration with the faith sector.

"Faithful Friends shows what can happen when a significant body, be it the council or Sandwell Public Health, communicate via the faith community."

As described above, the Faithful Friends played a key role in enabling ongoing co-production with Sandwell Public Health. That the network was well-established before the pandemic maximised the resilience of the community response.

"If you've done all the work beforehand, it gets you through the crisis."

Aside from this, key staff members facilitated the church's specific Covid-19 response. Alongside the strategic application of 'key worker' status described above, one of Holy Trinity's churchwardens played a facilitating role in the response. A former nurse, she was formally granted authority over the church site in relation to Covid-19. Revd David said, "if she tells me I can't do anything, I can't do it". The churchwarden's risk assessment of the site was endorsed by Sandwell Public Health, illustrating the value of her contribution in proactively modelling best practice to the public sector.

"It's not a one-way thing where Sandwell Public Health tell us what to do […] I like to think that we're making a public contribution." - Revd David Gould

"The reason so much stuff has worked is that the relationships already existed." – Canon Dr Andrew Smith, Faithful Friend and Director of Interfaith Relations, Church of England Birmingham

Image credit: The Faithful Friends / https://twitter.com/FaithFriendsOT

Case Study 2

Birmingham Mind is a Birmingham based charity which focusses on improving the lives, opportunities and choices open to people living with mental health issues and the delivery of services and interventions to try and prevent mental health problems from developing. With a range of interventions from residential care to community support services and workplace wellbeing training, Birmingham Mind works with over 5000 citizens every year and has sites across the city. This has increased with new services during pandemic.

Birmingham Mind has been a key partner in the city's response to the pandemic as a founding member of the C19 Support Brum partnership and as the city's thematic lead for mental health. As a service delivery partner, Birmingham Mind have had to quickly reconfigure their face to face support services to digital platforms, whilst also continuing their residential care provision through the rapid redeployment of staff. Birmingham Mind has also responded directly to the pandemic through the significant expansion of a helpline for people experiencing mental health issues.
Very early on in the crisis, Birmingham Mind recognised that it needed to offer an alternative out of hours crisis service as face to face services were not possible. Birmingham Mind already had a 9-5pm helpline in place, which had been set up in October 2019 – funded by Birmingham Mind fundraised and donated income. Within 2 days Birmingham Mind increased the hours of the service to 9am-11pm 7 days a week. Birmingham Mind were then approached by BSOL CCG to develop a responsive offer for frontline staff and citizens for mental health support.

ACCESSING MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

FOR CONCERNS SURROUNDING COVID-19

FOR KEY WORKERS

1 HAVING A BAD DAY AND WANT TO TALK TO SOMEONE ABOUT IT?

2 CALL LIVING WELL UK ON 0121 663 1217

4 TALK TO ONE OF OUR TRAINED THERAPISTS

3 ANSWER A FEW QUESTIONS ABOUT HOW YOU'RE FEELING

mind | Birmingham   LivingWell UK   Birmingham and Solihull NHS Clinical Commissioning Group

The response was developed in partnership with Birmingham Mind and Living Well UK. The Helpline was made as simple and accessible as possible with the Helpline becoming a "front door". Through this front door, people can access counselling related to Covid19, Keyworker counselling, general psychological therapies, access to community resources and self-help.

The next development came when NHS 111 asked if there was a way that some of their load could be lessened by someone taking responsibility for the mental health calls they were receiving. Working in partnership with NHS 111 and BSOL CCG commissioners and BSMHFT these calls were subsequently diverted to the Helpline.

Following this, there was a requirement nationally for all local mental health trusts to have 24/7 access to their services. Whilst this had been in BSOLs Work plan for next year the Government brought it forward due to Covid19. Birmingham Mind agreed that between 9am to 11pm 7 days a week they would be the access point. From 11pm-9am the same number was to be used but it would be diverted to BSMHFT and Forward Thinking Birmingham. This means that there is now a single number for people to call 24/7 a week to access support with their mental health – whether this be some simple self-help support through to emergency psychiatric help if needed.

The helpline has seen a steady increase in demand and is now fielding approximately 340 calls per week. Since 1st April, the helpline has taken over 7000 calls, and Birmingham Mind are in the process of recruiting a new staff team (as staff manning the lines in the

early crisis period, return to their substantive posts).

Birmingham Mind estimates that about 190 calls per week are from people that have their needs resolved within the call, i.e self-help techniques and general advice and guidance. By providing this helpline, it is hoped that citizens can be diverted from primary care and supported to access alternative provision where appropriate – effectively catching issues 'early on' rather than waiting for crisis, and the significant cost to the public purse that this creates.

At the same time, the helpline can also ensure that crisis support can be accessed, including pathways for people who are talking about suicidal thoughts. Birmingham Mind estimate that on average 10-15 calls per week are from people with some level of suicidal thoughts and a total of approx. 30-40 calls that are from people in crisis, however she noted that this number is increasing daily.

"What we try and make sure is that we follow up on their support…."

Birmingham Mind explained that the level of independence that they have, away from clinical or medical interventions has been important. A lot of stigma still surrounds poor mental health, often making citizens fearful or reluctant to access support, and so the 'softer', less clinical approach offered through the helpline will – it is hoped – encourage more people to access the support they need during this very challenging time.

It is important to Birmingham Mind that the service is not just seen as a signposting service. The Helpline provides call backs to ensure referrals have been successful and to check people's welfare. It also allows for callers to call more than once and if problems persist then Birmingham Mind will make calls on the caller's behalf. In essence the caller can access someone that will walk alongside them as they navigate the sometimes impenetrable systems of health, benefits, social care and support.

The BSOL CCG are keen for the helpline to form part of the ongoing crisis response. Birmingham Mind are also exploring opportunities to move some of the support to face-to-face in the community. Whilst the primary relationships in the setting up of the Helpline have been longstanding, the response from all the partners has been more collaborative.

Case Study 3

Everyone In
We spoke to two homelessness charities, Crisis Skylight and St Basils, about their involvement in the 'Everyone In' strategy aimed at getting all rough sleepers into accommodation at the height of the crisis.

Crisis Skylight is the Birmingham branch of national charity, Crisis. Its Director is the current chair of the Homelessness Forum, which has a membership of over 150 cross sector organisations with an interest in homelessness. He is also a member of Birmingham City

Councils Homelessness Partnership Board and has been heavily involved in the WMCA Task Force on Homelessness. Crisis Skylight was the thematic lead for Homelessness within the C19 Brum partnership.

Crisis Skylight offer a range of front-line delivery services to people who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness; including mentoring, information advice and guidance, advocacy and employment support.

St Basils is both a Charity and a Housing Association providing a holistic range of accommodation and support services to young people aged 16-25 who are homeless, vulnerable or at risk. St Basils works across the West Midlands, operating over 40 sites in Birmingham, Coventry, Sandwell, Solihull, Walsall, Worcestershire and Warwickshire offering over 500 units of accommodation per night and a range of prevention and support services. St Basils Chief Executive Officer is the chair of the WMCA Task Force on Homelessness.

The Everyone In strategy was driven by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and was set out in a letter to local leaders on the 26th March 2020. The basic principles were to:

- *focus on people who are, or are at risk of, sleeping rough, and those who are in accommodation where it is difficult to self-isolate, such as shelters and assessment centres*
- *make sure that these people have access to the facilities that enable them to adhere to*
public health guidance on hygiene or isolation, ideally single room facilities
- *utilise alternative powers and funding to assist those with no recourse to public funds who require shelter and other forms of support due to the COVID-19 pandemic*
- *mitigate their own risk of infection, and transmission to others, by ensuring they are able to self-isolate as appropriate in line with public health guidance*

MHCLG,26 March 2020

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/876466/Letter_from_Minister_Hall_to_Local_Authorities.pdf.

At the onset of the crisis, Birmingham had around 30 rough sleepers in the city. These individuals were, in the most part, well known to providers – particularly those organisations involved in delivering against the Rough Sleepers Initiative (Shelter, St Basils, CGL, Trident & Sifa) and the West Midlands Housing First Programme (delivered locally by Shelter and more recently Trident and Cranston) which has been working to engage some of the most entrenched rough sleepers in the city.

By April 2020, over 70 individuals had been placed in temporary accommodation, which included those with No Recourse to Public Funds. This brought the rough sleeping numbers down to a low of 4 (all of whom were known to providers and had been given an offer of accommodation and additional support). This was achieved primarily through the coordinated effort of the homelessness charities and housing providers, and through the availability of hotel rooms. There was also a push pull in operation as the street economy

completely changed as a result of lockdown – street begging became extremely difficult and through a combination of the right offer and support it was observed that many more people accepted the offer to come in. These efforts were coordinated by the Local Authority and strategically supported through the formation of a Homelessness Sub-Group from the Homeless Partnership Board as well as a Homelessness and Housing sub-group from BVSC Thematic work.

Our participants noted that the relationships were strengthened further through a commitment to not only house individuals, but to ensure that the crucial wraparound support was also provided. As one interviewee observed *"everyone dropped their own boundaries, and just focused on the need."*

The observations provided through our interviews were substantiated through the regular C19 Support Brum Partnership thematic briefings produced by BVSC and reviewed as part of our research. These briefings, shared throughout lockdown and beyond have chronicled the response. They reveal:

- how outreach and face to face services were continued and telephone and online support were made available through Shelter, Crisis and St Basils
- webinars, hosted by Homeless Link, aimed at managers, commissioners and front line workers were used to share resources across the sector
- Birmingham City Council Safeguarding Board provided updates regarding the Rough Sleepers Everyone In strategy, noting that 70 single individuals including those with NRPF had been accommodated and that the outreach team were working closely with the remaining 11 individuals who were continuing to sleep rough
- Alternative Giving (fundraising) campaign launched to encourage supporting people into moving on positively, and also information and guidance (posters) provided aimed at people unable or unwilling to socially distance
- Finally, reflected on WMCA's report that set out "the success of the Government policy to bring everyone in during lockdown who may have faced rough sleeping otherwise".
- Details of a newly formed BVSC sub-group which "are now having a fortnightly meeting of this group alongside housing leaders who are not necessarily part of the thematic approach but are key figures in both the housing & homelessness sectors. This has allowed a sharp focus and positive communication between leaders who are working hard to tackle the issues presented especially during Covid19."
- the Rough Sleepers Summit conference, hosted by BVSC "At BVSC we have been organising a Rough Sleeper Recovery Conference which is focused on bringing together faith, community and voluntary sector partners to look at how we move forward positively and do not return to the old normal. We wanted to seize the opportunity, with so many rough sleepers coming off the streets during lockdown and services returning with a renewed focus". This was attended by 49 people and highlighted much of the partnership work done and was a call to action not to reinstate a street economy through the return of street soup kitchens which may inadvertently support someone to continue rough sleeping but to co-ordinate targeted food support where needed. The Active Wellbeing Society are now working to bring the street feeder groups under a Food Poverty Action group.

Organisations across the third sector, housing providers, national bodies (i.e. National

Housing Federation, Homeless Link) the DWP and the NHS – alongside the Local Authority – have worked collaboratively building on pre-existing relationships. However, there were also some new ways of working – for example, two housing association were able to offer a large number of properties to allow women and children to move on from refuge into permanent accommodation. This freed up space for other women (who may have been forced to rough sleep otherwise) to be able to access refuge accommodation. Leaders of charities became less competitive and much more collaborative with larger organisations sharing info such as risk assessments templates to support the smaller organisations.

"It showed that it can be done. There is no excuse now, for anyone to not have access to accommodation" St Basils

It is very clear from the interviews we held, and from reviewing the briefing documents provided through the C19 Support Brum partnership, that the existing strong relationships between the third sector and the public sector centred on homelessness were pivotal to the speed and success of the Everyone In strategy. Furthermore, these existing relationships acted as an anchor to pulling in additional partners (i.e. social housing providers, food provision etc.) so that the whole city was working together.

Case Study 4

Hope Community, Heath Town, Wolverhampton Heath Town is typical of 1960s estates with high rise tower blocks and low rise maisonette blocks. It is one of the most deprived and ethnically diverse communities falling within the worst 5% of wards nationally in terms of health, education, employment, housing, crime, and child poverty. 45% of children live in poverty. It is ranked within the city's top 3 areas for high levels of drugs, gang violence and youth crime. Domestic violence, drugs and alcohol abuse are prevalent within households on Heath Town estate – Office of National Statistics, 2011 Census, 2012 Heath Town Ward Profile, and 2014-16 Heathfield Park Local Neighbourhood Plan. This deprivation and violence seriously affects the lives of the children and young people who disclose fears and reprisals of gang affiliation, grooming, and sexual exploitation.

Just prior to the full lockdown, Hope Community started to deliver emergency food parcels particularly to elderly and most vulnerable residents in Heath Town. However, whilst they were "getting food out" they found that "getting food in" was the main difficulty. Hope Community continued this activity for the first 2 to 3 weeks. At this point many members of the staff team had to be furloughed and Hope were unable to continue to deliver food parcels. However, by this time the Local Authority had set up its response team for delivering emergency food parcels.

However, Hope became aware that the emergency food parcels being distributed by the Council were frequently not the sort of food that their (ethnically diverse) elderly population usually ate or knew how to cook. So Hope launched "Lockdown lunches", cooking hot meals every week and delivering them to households by volunteers. This presented Hope with the opportunity to check on the older and vulnerable residents in

their community – to provide some contact by knocking on the door, standing back and having a socially distanced chat. This turned out to be a lifeline for the older people.

Hope were also aware that there was a lot of confusion amongst the residents of Heath Town about the Government guidelines about lockdown, particularly for people for whom English is not their first language. Initially messages were coming out in English and it took some time before messages emerged in other locally-used languages. Therefore, Hope set up a local telephone hotline, taking between 30-40 phone calls a day. They found that many people were feeling isolated and confused, and many were worrying about financial issues. Subsequently, Hope took the decision to produce and deliver regular newsletters to every household in Heath Town. The newsletter contained government information in different languages, as well as information to support mental health and wellbeing, such as armchair exercises for older people and information about their telephone befriending service. Hope also developed "Bags of Play" to support vulnerable young people who were finding it difficult being confined in the high-rise flats, and "Grow your own at Home" aimed at families. The "Grow your own at Home" - growing herbs and some vegetables on windowsills and balconies - was a particular innovation. The kits contained soil, pots and seeds, which were particularly welcomed amongst ESOL learners who could not access the range of herbs and vegetables they needed for their cooking – and which were not readily available in their local shops.

Hope took the decision to increase their presence in Heath Town because of the levels of deprivation and vulnerability. However, most of their usual volunteers were old and/or shielding, so they had to quickly recruit volunteers. In fact, Hope could only respond to the emerging needs in their community through the rapid recruitment of volunteers, helped by Wolverhampton Voluntary Service Council (WVSC) who carried out DBS checks.

Bags of Play and Grow you own at Home projects were supported by donations from local businesses and individual donations via Facebook. Wolverhampton-based Rudge Wood Horticulture CIC donated seeds, compost and pots. What is more, there is now a plan to develop a "Village Pantry" with a growing space for local residents, through the development of partnerships with local farmers. Hope are in the process of bidding for funding to support this. The plan aims to "bring people together using food", highlighting the positives of cultural diversity. Since COVID-19 it has become apparent that 56 languages are spoken in Heath Town.

The development of new activities to support the community and the door to door deliveries enabled Hope to make contact with residents they had not interacted with before – those who were tucked away in the corners in the myriad of passageways that make up Heath Town. These people would otherwise have been alone and isolated. This engagement with new people has been one of the positive outcomes of COVID but Hope acknowledges that "the trick is to keep them engaged". Talking to these new communities as a result of COVID, Hope are reflecting more on the services they deliver – whether they are "still fit for purpose". Indeed, some people who had lived in Heath Town for 10-15 years had never heard of Hope. With COVID local people had more of an input into what services they provide and how they deliver those initiatives.

"no other organisation in the area with the same physical presence as Hope".

Whilst Hope worked positively with a number of organisations, there were tensions. For example, they were concerned about the referrals made to them by the local authority. These residents were often very isolated and vulnerable. Therefore Hope questioned, "why is it ok for Hope and our volunteers to be doing this work, but it's not ok for their staff and volunteers to work out in the community?" Furthermore, Hope did feel that the local authority could have done more. Whilst they were "in the background" – because their staff were working from home – this left community services being delivered by the voluntary sector and their staff and volunteers.

In addition, Hope reported that it was difficult to access additional resources to deliver the COVID-specific services. Where were the emergency pots of money to develop the responses they needed? As a result they had to "eat into their (unrestricted) reserves". They said: "we didn't need huge pots; just little bits to help us". They have since applied to the National Lottery Community Fund for funding, but what was needed at the time was access to smaller and more responsive funding sources.

Case Study 5

Base 25 works with an estimated 5000 young people each year. They are a trusted local charity that offers a range of services for children, young people and their families. Base 25 offers volunteer and student placement opportunities for local people that together with fundraising efforts generate over £500,000 worth of services for young people in Wolverhampton. The information, advice and guidance provided through Base 25 services are quality assured by Matrix Standard.

Base 25's counselling has traditionally been done face to face but within 4 days of lockdown they converted 80% of their appointments to online support. For some young people this was not possible – as often "home is not a safe place for them to be" during counselling – so they had to arrange to meet with them outside, for instance canalside or

parks, doing crisis interventions or providing guidance whilst socially distancing.

As a staff team Base 25 made the decision to work on a basis of "what can we do" not "what can't we do". They feel that this distinguished them from the statutory sector organisations working with young people. Base 25 allocated specific staff members for "young people in crisis to speak to" because of the lockdown – these staff were working at home. And unlike the statutory services -

"we could move quickly as we did not have to do all the form filling – so we were very efficient"

Initially Base 25 delivered food parcels and activity packs – and sessional staff did some workshops online for young people whilst the managers delivered the resources to young people to keep them engaged with activities. The managers felt "we could not ask people to do things that we would not do!" Throughout lockdown Base 25 developed and maintained good links with the Police, informing them about where staff would be when they had to work with vulnerable young people outside. This is because their counselling rooms were too small for social distancing so they utilised the Green Spaces in Wolverhampton.

Indeed, the National Youth Agency produced a report that supported their thinking around that. This engagement of young people in Green Spaces has "gone really well – with the young people are talking more freely - more relaxed and less forced. Indeed, they found that being outside "broke down the barriers of a counselling room" so much so that it will now remain "part of our core offer". Another benefit of working outside is that in the light of the obesity problem:

"we do want young people in the parks and to have a healthy relationship with their physical environment. And the police pass and say hello – and show that not every policeman is an enemy"

As trust built up between Base 25 and the Police, eventually the Police alerted them to any young people who were in public spaces – or if there were reports of anti-social behaviour in specific areas – so Base 25 could go in and actively work in those areas. This partnership worked well for the young people. As a result of their response to COVID and the swift adaptations they made to support vulnerable young people, Base 25 "ended up with better relationships with CCG, LA and police. They understand the work we are doing better – and have seen the results of what we have done'

Digital spaces have offered more opportunities and access for young people in crisis. Counselling was delivered on Zoom and Base 25 found they could offer the same service 24/7 for the same amount of money, whilst also reducing their environmental footprint. "We will continue to offer digital appointments as young people have found this more accessible and more flexible". Base 25's counselling had traditionally been done face to face but within 4 days of lockdown they converted 80% of their appointments to online support. However for some young people this was not possible – as often "home is not a safe place for them to be" during counselling – so they had to arrange to meet with them outside, by the canal-side or in parks, in order to provide crisis intervention or guidance whilst socially distancing.

Base 25 is part of the LA's "Detached Youth Work Programme" working with vulnerable young people in the city. That Programme was due to come to an end but the Police contacted the LA to report on how well those interventions had worked during lockdown. As a result funding from the LA has been continued for at least 2 months. Base report that as a result of the partnership between them and the Police there is "trust and a realisation about the work we are doing". What is more they have been able to give the LA "an evidence base" on the importance of funding youth services. Base 25 say this is partly because "we did not close for a single day".

Lockdown also provided the space to reflect on families. "We have involved families and parents more than we ever had". Indeed they now have parents who have started volunteering with them. This is an important development as "on the housing estates it gives us more credibility….building bridges with the community". In this way Base 25 feel that these services have gone back 25 years to the type of youth work they were able to do before the cuts…."offering more support to families, not just crisis counselling". For youth work can have a tendency to "disempower parents inadvertently". Parents may have a child with anxieties , and "we give the child the skills and confidence to change their own behaviour" but there is not the same opportunity to work with the parents, so "parents can feel bad" because they were not able to help bring about that change themselves. "A lot of parents might not have had positive experiences themselves as children …and we don't allow them the opportunity to learn and change…so there is no real social change"

There are tensions and recommendations that this has highlighted for Base 25: the crisis has highlighted how there is a need to bring back a properly funded youth service.

"One of the most heartbreaking things is that we have been working with young people since COVID who did not know what youth workers were".

The Connexions Service has "tried to mould the youth service with careers services" but young people have a need and a right be a young person now and enjoy life – to have fun, engage in activities and develop their citizenship. For Base 25 this crisis has shown that youth services should be less about employment: not just about "feeding the factories". For if young people do not have "a level of emotional intelligence or good mental health then you are not going to thrive in the world of work".

Base 25 feel, therefore, that governments and LAs need to reflect more on their funding models. There tends to be targeted funding to meet prioritised needs – but this approach is not necessarily meeting the needs of young people, their families and their communities. "You have to include the whole community – this targeting of funding has done more to pull communities apart. We need to try and treat the young person holistically". They recommend that public agencies invest in the young person rather than seeing them as just "a label. Just because they are self-harming - they are still a person".

Case Study 6

The Active Well Being Society (TAWS) The Active Well Being Society (TAWS) is a Birmingham based community benefit society and cooperative working to develop healthy, happy communities living active and connected lives. TAWS offer a range of free services to actively encourage well-being – including active streets, communities and parks, holistic interventions and 'share shacks' where communities can 'borrow' items such as toys, garden tools and equipment and sports kits.

TAWS work with a range of other partners including The Real Junk Food Project (TRJF).

As early as January 2020, the TAWS senior management team began to think about how they could "turn to face the crisis" Whilst not their usual business, they decided to move into the space of food provision, telephone support and prescription delivery.

TAWS became the thematic lead for food poverty in Birmingham for the C19 Support Brum partnership as well has setting up and leading the #BrumTogether initiative, which was instrumental in ensuring that food was distributed across the city to its most vulnerable citizens.
TAWS were already working with The Real Junk Food Project – who had established relationships with supermarkets – and a number of community cafes. One of the key challenges was how to access food when the usual supply chain was drying up and demand was increasing. TAWS found that not only was there little left of the staple foods usually provided by supermarkets, but the food banks across the city were experiencing significant capacity issues.

In the weeks running up to lockdown, the thematic sub group for food distribution, led by TAWS was beginning to communicate regularly through on-line meetings and whatsapp groups. This sub-group included a range of organisations including faith groups, food

banks and other voluntary sector organisations. Between them, they began pooling resources and identifying where significant gaps were emerging. Part of this group was the West Midlands lead for the long-standing national food distribution charity, FareShare. During the early meetings, FareShare shared some learning from neighbouring county Warwickshire, whose County Council had contracted with FareShare to deliver food to the county.

Working with FareShare and TRJFP, TAWS calculated that an additional 20 tonnes of food each week was needed in Birmingham to supplement the food the group was accessing from a variety of sources. (retailers donating food surplus and charitable donations).

TAWS put together a business plan and presented this to Birmingham City Council. The council, recognising the scale of the challenge subsequently agreed to enter into a contract with FareShare, purchasing £600,000 of food to be distributed by TAWS and the network of the #BrumTogether partnership. BCC also supported the development of new food distribution centres in Ladywood and Druids Heath. The first delivery from FareShare took place on the 8th April 2020. At the height of the crisis, it was estimated that the Birmingham depot was reaching around 21,000 people every week; this was in addition to the 20,000 people identified as clinically vulnerable and entitled to food through the national scheme. (BCC Covid19 Report, June 2020).

The people we spoke to at TAWS described how this was the first time that faith, voluntary and community organisations had coordinated their activity across the city. A network of over 70 organisations was formed which meant that gaps could be easily identified and responded to; food banks were provided with food to add to those being received through the normal channels of donations and relationships with supermarkets and other food providers.

"With a collective effort, and a collective voice, we were stronger" TAWS

Behind the scenes, TAWS continued to work with partners from across the city (GP's, social prescribers etc) to identify vulnerable citizens. Staff were re-assigned new roles in either food banks, delivery or coordination – whilst any vulnerable staff who were themselves shielding, became involved in the other area of TAWS support (telephone helplines and befriending). There was a strong social media presence, and the initiative quickly gained momentum – creating awareness of ever more need.

Reflecting on the sheer speed of the operation, TAWS explained that in 'normal times', securing funding would have been beset with the usual commissioning processes and delays. However, in this instance "the council were quick to act, based on a sensible discussion." They understood the need to act now, and act quickly.

TAWS also noted how, after a fairly challenging decade of austerity and 'bruised' relationships between the sector and the Local Authority, the trust has been significantly repaired and there seems now to be a real recognition of the value of the sector.

"No-one just went home" everyone wanted to be involved, everyone wanted to respond. There was a strong sense of duty."

Similarly, amongst the sector itself, there has been a change in relationships. Whereas in the past there has been some tension and competition, it felt like "professional arrogance" disappeared and collaboration was spontaneously achieved.

There have been a lot of unintended (positive) consequences of this; barriers have been broken down and relationships have been strengthened. TAWS have also seen the creation of new collaborations (such as the 'Wear and Share' project, which has emerged as a result of food deliverers identifying that many individuals and families did not have sufficient clothing). TAWS also observed how many of the individuals who were asking for help around food, sometimes for the first time, were then finding themselves able to access a myriad of other support. Food had become an 'engagement' tool for people with multiple and complex needs; developing trust with citizens and hopefully then being able to go on and un-lock some of the inequalities.

"Things came out of it that you wouldn't have dreamt of!"

The crisis also created opportunities to work with other parties that had never previously engaged with TAWS; Aston University, for example, opened up its grand hall as a food distribution centre and coordinated student volunteers to help to manage it; Aston Villa opened up its doors to store clothes for the Wear and Share scheme. Many, many other businesses supported the #BrumTogether partnership in a range of ways – from food provision, to the donation of masks.

TAWS explained that community involvement has been at a hyper-local level – with individuals speaking on behalf of a group of neighbours; and people feeling that they can advocate on others behalf. Street Caring, Street Sharing has become huge – and people seem to feel much more connected. "It is as though people have really switched onto inequalities, and that there is a movement and a change. I guess it has created a sense of discomfort."

As a result of the work done by TAWS and partners thoughout the crisis, a new Food Justice Network has been established. The aim of the network is to ensure there is a "secure and fair food supply for all citizens, ensuring that people in Birmingham have enough to eat and are able to enjoy a healthy, balanced diet. Building on the work of food banks and other partners involved in #BrumTogether to look at ways of addressing food inequality and insecurity."

The Food Justice Network will be coordinated by TAWS and will include a range of statutory, voluntary and community sector, and private sector supporters. All members are committed to working together in a collaborative and distributive way to identify long term solutions around food poverty.

"To take a strength-based approach and work together for a collective good"

(TAWS, Slide Deck FJN August 2020)
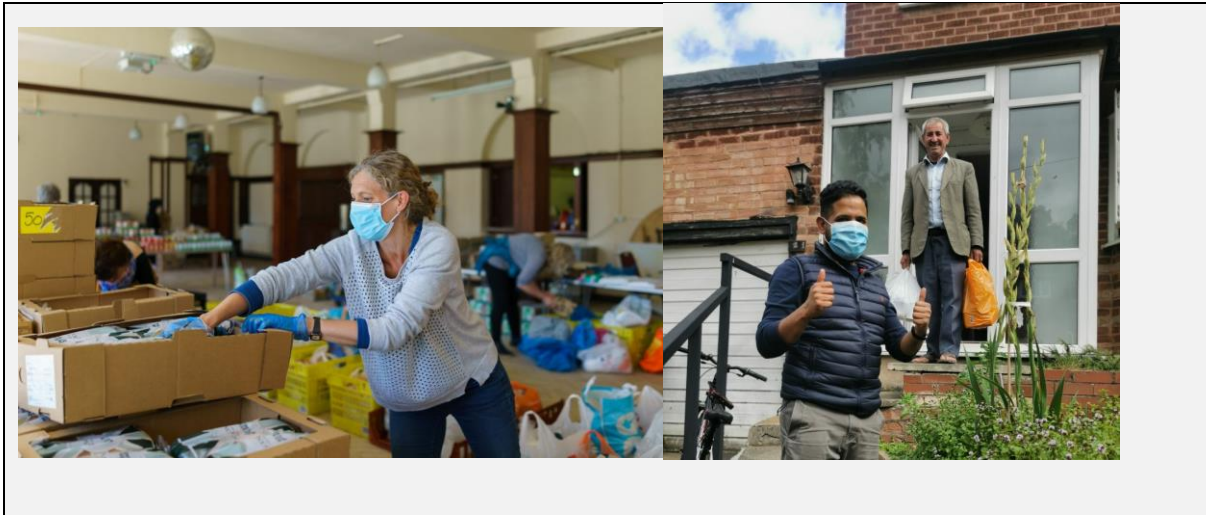
Case Study 7

Capturing the Youth Voice during Covid19

Youth Voice is made up of young people between 16-25 years old that have experienced homelessness, sharing their lived experience to support and bring about change across the UK.

The Youth Voice project at St Basils work with young people across the region, and nationally, to capture the voice of young people through face to face engagement activities, promotion of conversations and the facilitation of peer research.

St Basils have a long standing commitment to ensuring that young people are at the centre of their work, helping to inform and shape service delivery. This is done across services in the West Midlands, working to engage with young people who are either living in St Basils accommodation, or who are accessing support services.

The national Youth Voice project, funded through MHCLG, consists of 40 young people who form a Youth Parliament that informs policy through sharing the experiences and realities of youth homelessness from those with lived experience. It aims to break down the stigmas of homelessness and help Government to understand the barriers that young people face, and the impact that policies can have.

St Basils provide training and support to young people to ensure they are equipped to engage with a range of stakeholders, so that their experiences are listened to and valued. At this national level, the young people work in partnership with Government departments to improve the outcomes for other young people.

"At St Basils, young people are at the centre of what works….it's in our DNA"

Having traditionally relied on the a face to face model of group activities and one to one support, the reality of Covid19 required St Basils to think very quickly about how they could adapt their services. Being acutely aware of the potential impact that the pandemic would have on the mental health of many of the young people they were working with, they knew that the support would be more important than ever.

In early March, the Youth Voice project launched a social media campaign, encouraging young people to stay at home, using 'stay at home selfies' which helped young people to understand their own personal responsibility when full lock down came into force. Despite pre-conceptions that young people would be reluctant to do so, St Basils found that young people were very responsive to these messages.

However, lock down created a lot of challenge for young people – particularly those who were in their own accommodation. All of the usual support and physical connections were gone – such as friendship networks, social activities and attending college or university or work – and this left a lot of young people very vulnerable. Interestingly, those living in supported housing faired better as some of the face to face work was able to continue. Staff across St Basils accommodation, whilst reduced, were able to develop creative activities (such as yoga, mindfulness and a socially distanced DJ set!) to create safe, calm and fun environments).

At a national level however, young people quickly began to report being in mental health crisis. St Basils work in a Psychologically Informed Environment (PIE) and the National Youth Engagement Service Manager was able to work in partnership with the in-house PIE clinical psychologists to put in place appropriate mechanisms to address this. For example, she was able to encourage young people to 'walk and talk' with her, whereby she would phone them and they would walk together and talk about their fears and anxieties.

St Basils recognised how important regular 'connect sessions' were going to be. On line quizzes, regular zoom meetings and telephone calls were set up with the 40 young people attached to the Youth Voice project. Once the regular connection had been established, and when young people felt safe and cared for, this moved into shifting the normal activities of Youth Voice on-line.

At the same time, St Basils secured funding from Land Aid and created a 'Boost my Happy' Fund. Young people were encouraged to apply for funding to 'Boost their Happy', for example to buy books, a keyboard or even a pair of trainers. It also offered young people the opportunity to purchase tablets or laptops if they did not have one and enabled the service to deliver work digitally and creatively.

Workshops were moved on line, including a five week programme delivered in partnership with the University of Birmingham's Sprint Programme which is encouraging young people to think about 'move on' from Covid19 and supporting them as we emerge into the 'new normal' and addressing their anxieties and fears.

Youth Voice has just completed a two week consultation with young people across St Basils to capture what has been good and what has not been as good during this period and they have since developed a set of recommendations based on what they have learnt from Covid19. They ran a virtual Youth Parliament in September where they presented these findings to the Minister for MHCGL.

The National Youth Engagement Service Manager explained that Covid19 has really given St Basils cause to think about the way in which they engage with young people.

Some young people have really enjoyed the shift to on-line, or telephone based support. One young person talked about the benefits of being able to work with their progression coach whilst on a whatsapp call doing cooking together. She found this far less intimidating that going to a meeting at an office full of other people and she felt able to just talk about herself whist cooking. Others have found it more difficult, but the beauty is that now they know they can offer a more tailored approach rather than a 'one size fits all' and that digital will play a major part in this going forward.

The use of Facebook groups and announcements has also enabled St Basils to communicate with young people, and give them a bit of independence in terms of the way they chose to interact with services.

Covid19 has also re-iterated how important it is to capture the voices of young people; of listening to young people and in making sure services are person-centred and adapt to their needs.

A key partner for Youth Voice is the MHCLG. The project is funded explicitly to support Government in understanding the issues that young people face. The Young People will carry out research, consult with their peers and work closely in partnership with Government to ensure that they understand how this pandemic has affected young people and will continue to impact on them in the coming months and years.

This information was presented to Kelly Tollhurst Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Rough Sleeping and Housing in September, through an online Youth Parliament, meaning that these voices were heard and will, it is hoped, really influence future policy. "In regards to engagement with St Basils, it's a really exciting time because it has enabled us to connect with more young people than we would have done before. There is a real chance to do something very exciting, new and fresh. We need to harness this, and whatever challenges are faced, young people deserve the support. So we need to adapt, flex, change and review."

Case Study 8

Citizen's Advice Wolverhampton Citizen's Advice Wolverhampton are an independent charity and a member of the Citizens Advice national network. They provide information, advice, guidance, and specialist casework to the people of Wolverhampton from several locations across the city. They also deliver certain housing advice and Pension Wise services in the Black Country, Shropshire and parts of Birmingham. In addition to advice and guidance services they also undertake research and campaigning activity, using extensive data about the problems local people face to try to influence policy makers.

Initially Citizens Advice Wolverhampton had to shut down all their face-to-face services. To compensate they set up telephone helplines and a webchat, based on volunteers working at home. "The aim of it was to broaden how we could reach people – we were concerned that clients who used to come to us a lot – and whether that's right or wrong we do have some clients who come to us a lot – we weren't getting them on the phone". CAW built in 15-minute initial telephone assessment asking: Do you have access to the internet? Do you have a person at home who could help you? Do you feel comfortable having telephone advice if we can give that to you? This was to help the volunteer to channel the query to the right web advisor.

The ethos of Citizen's Advice is to empower clients – but CAW report that in some cases face to face contact can actually hinder a client because the staff end up saying "I'll do it all for you" and "we send the client off saying, We've done it for you". Now, with telephone and webchat, clients are required to take more ownership for their problems so in the future they're not so reliant on CAW to come back to fix their problems. This approach seems to encourage more proactivity, with clients encouraged to solve their issue with guidance from us. However, "it is a fine line between empowering and disempowering people".

CAW report that is likely that having multiple channels to provide advice through will persist into the future as this has proved to be popular. For instance, for people who are working, or who have got young children and find it difficult to queue in the offices, or for people with disabilities, not relying on face to face advice is working better. Web chat in particular has been a really useful adaptation. People can "pop onto their phone and chat with someone on their lunch break" and get help resolving their issue – "they get a link to some information and then solve their query through self-help, with a little bit of direction".

CAW used lockdown to develop the skills of staff and volunteers. Lockdown meant they had volunteers that were not able to come into the office and, as setting up phone lines for all of them was not possible, they had to think about "how do we keep the volunteers engaged" and "what can we use this time to particularly do – that sometimes when the office is running so flat out we can't do?". Not only that but if volunteers can't meet each other, "how do we foster that community environment still?" CAW decided to use the time to train all their staff and volunteers in basic British Sign Language (and some basic cultural understanding) to support the Deaf community. CAW have a Deaf Advisor but his time is limited. Training their staff and volunteers in BSL has allowed them to greet their clients to help them feel more welcome, and also to be able to communicate with Deaf

volunteers and the Deaf advisor, who frequently are excluded from the conversational banter between the staff and volunteer team.

Key work during Covid-19: The first weeks of what their clients were dealing with were traumatic. This was not like the usual problems on a day to day basis, "what I call a fence dispute" which can be sorted. These problems were "horrid", like "I've lost my job", "I've lost my home", "I have no money"…and "that was our world for a couple of weeks. That's tough going…not having the easier ones….that you know how to resolve". CAW tried to relieve some of this trauma by encouraging people to use technology as a way of creating a supportive community because CAW could not support them face to face.

There was also a shift in the "nature" of the advice: what advice looks like and how much they are expected to do. CAW worried about how much pressure this was putting on their volunteers and staff. Volunteers in particular "give their time up for free, to do something which is rewarding"… "why would you sign up to go somewhere to be miserable for an afternoon?" So CAW had to think about communication. They set up Facebook groups. Guidance tutors set up one on one chats with volunteers using technology, just to talk about how life was going under lockdown, "about stuff you would have a chat about over a cup of tea in the office at lunchtime. I think that's been important to keep going". In relation to staff wellbeing and building a supportive Citizens Advice community, CAW use "Workplace", a package similar to Facebook for the work setting. A special CA Workplace was created for all the different local CA offices across the country to share knowledge and good practice. "That has been really good because one size does not fit all. With a CA you have different community needs; different buildings; different types of volunteers; the amount of money; funding you get from the LA; all these things are variables". Thus CAW report that sharing COVID-specific adaptations in this was has been incredibly useful to individual CAs.

Initially volunteers were tasked to do telephone assessments but since lockdown eased they have moved to web advice, working from home. Since the office reopened clients come into the office and they are put into a room on their own and the advisor is on the other end of the screen. They can have 6 clients in building at a time – for initial assessments with social distancing. They have the web advice cameras in the advice rooms with the Volunteers at home. They use music in the waiting room to deflect sound to ensure confidentiality. "It's very much trial and error".

On the first day they opened CAW had a few clients drop in who have just walked past because they preferred to use the service face to face or who cannot go online. CAW worried about digital inclusion. "When we talk about digital literacy we talk about it in terms of people not being able to use it". However, the bigger problem is digital exclusion, people not being able to afford the internet or not being able to afford a device to log on to. "If you are talking about someone on £73 a week …and you're asking them to pay £18 a month…that's a food shop".

Case Study 9

Erdington NNS (Witton Lodge) Erdington NNS began in April 2019 and is co-managed by Witton Lodge Community Association and Compass Support. There are 10 Neighbourhood Network Schemes in Birmingham, based in each of the constituencies. They enable engagement with and investment in community assets, in order to support older people to connect to individuals, groups, organisations, activities, services and places in their neighbourhoods. Witton Lodge Community Association is a community association and community led housing provider at the heart of the Erdington constituency.

As part of the Covid-19 response, Erdington NNS established and facilitated the Erdington Covid19 Taskforce, which links together a wide group of networks and stakeholders providing health and wellbeing services. Meeting weekly, the Taskforce has active and positive engagement from the local MP, Councillors and stakeholders, establishing new links and strengthening existing ones. This approach has allowed the alignment of projects, minimised duplication, sharing of information and resources, and identifying and filling a series of gaps across the constituency. It is a co-ordinated approach that ensures all residents in the locality have their needs met. Erdington NNS has facilitated and coordinated emergency and crisis support, advice services and emotional support including bereavement. The aim of services has been to provide holistic and integrated wrap around support and care to ensure no vulnerable older adults are left behind.

From the beginnings of lockdown, the relationship that Erdington NNS had with local Mutual Aid Groups enabled community volunteers to be actively involved in service provision. The NNS supported local groups to involve volunteers safely with procedure guidance, DBS checking etc. Training was offered to volunteers in food hygiene, health and safety - social distancing etc., digital literacy and community development to support the growth of these groups. Together, the Mutual Aid groups have had over 90 new volunteers register with them. The leader of the Erdington Community Response group is now part of the NNS Steering Group in Erdington, creating an enduring partnership. Erdington NNS has recently completed some work to help them identify new areas of need in order to retain their volunteers after the food crisis stabilises and have presented 10 proposals to them which they are fully engaged with.

Working as part as part of The Active Wellbeing Society food network, Erdington NNS established several food hubs across the constituency, enabling existing and new food banks to collect, store and distribute food. This included working with volunteer groups to organise and coordinate volunteers and provide emergency support, prescription collections and other support for the most vulnerable. In June, Rob Netherway, Flourishing Community Services Manager at Witton Lodge said, "**We couldn't do any of this without volunteers. If our volunteers left us the food distribution and wellbeing would start to dry up overnight**".

This level of support has meant that over 10,000 food parcels have been delivered in Erdington by members of organisations within the Erdington Covid19 Taskforce. At the start of the pandemic they supported groups to access food by working with providers such as The Real Junk Food Project to store and distribute food to organisations, and

Bethany Foodbank who supplied fresh food on days of delivery. Erdington NNS encouraged Bethany Foodbank to apply for an NNS Small Grant to remain open for longer. They supported other partners, especially volunteer groups with food distribution efforts.

Erdington NNS liaised with local churches and community organisations able to support individuals with bereavement, including discussing ways to continue providing services remotely. Some of Erdington NNS funded assets have provided support services such as bereavement and counselling, and the creation of a 'Bereavement Café'.

A 'digital social' service was launched through Facebook Live giving residents a chance to connect, share concerns, ask questions and be supported. Coping skills group sessions were delivered to help individuals feel less lonely and isolated, to stay motivated and to reduce stress, anxiety & depression. Many of the more isolated and vulnerable members of the community cannot access virtual services due to poor IT literacy. Therefore an IT trainer has been employed, funded by the WMCA, which will help to upskill citizens, particularly older adults, creating better resilience if there's a local lockdown, and beyond. Witton Lodge Community Association have also begun to establish a Digital Lending Library, commissioned by Erdington NNS, to meet the growing digital divide faced by older adults. This will enable older residents to borrow digital equipment and be supported to learn how to use it by the IT trainer.

A telephone wellbeing service was established with trained advisers & counsellors to provide intensive one to one support that addresses a range of health and wellbeing needs. There is also a telephone befriending scheme, which uses volunteers to maintain regular social contact with individuals identified with low level needs who need social contact. These sessions enable regular social contact, to share concerns, develop coping skills and meet others to feel less isolated. Between April and June over 7,500 wellbeing 'activities' (e.g. telephone calls) took place across the partnership.

They produced and now maintain the **Erdington Emergency Asset Register**, a directory of support organisations operating throughout the Covid-19 situation available to front-line workers and the public. This can be found here: https://bit.ly/2xRtY3T. They completed initial mapping of gaps with partners and produced press information to solicit NNS small grant applications to fill these gaps. Networkers contacted organisations on the asset register and identified those suitable for funding. They have supported existing grant holders to amend delivery, while helping new grant holders to complete applications.

They have created a communications plan and co-ordinated communications with Taskforce partners. They have also developed a funding plan to co-ordinate fundraising efforts to enable further service development across the constituency.

"Because we were already established as an NNS we already had a lot of links and contacts and details of organisations. So that helped tremendously – the foundations and the A frame were pretty strong for us to build on."

In addition, the Covid 19 pandemic has meant that Erdington NNS have accelerated what they already planned to do: a typical five years of building trust with a new organisation

has been bypassed to move straight to partnership working.

They have worked closely with Mutual Aid groups, and have provided them with training to ensure they have been able to work safely. They continue to support them in order to help them grow and sustain work beyond the pandemic. The NNS have become the middlemen for the mutual aid groups, who have historically struggled to engage at a city wide level. The NNS have been able to implement a clear channel into citywide structures.

The NNS have engaged with smaller groups on ward level. They have drawn on existing relationships, which have been strengthened, and built new ones, for example in Perry Common ward. Here, the NNS have previously worked with some of the local churches to organise Christmas events etc. So the response in Perry Common has drawn on existing partnerships and instead of having an event planning group, they created a covid planning group.

They have also found that they are working with organisations they've never had any contact with. When they were putting together the emergency asset register in March, they reached out into the community and found new organisations to work with. Also, as Erdington NNS were named as the neighbourhood lead, people got in touch and then were brought into the fold. New relationships built include with the Polish Expats Association, who have provided support and Active Arts – an arts based organisation who have taken the lead on communications. Rob Netherway, Flourishing Community Services Manager at Witton Lodge said "When you talk about an emergency response, you wouldn't imagine that you'd need an arts based organisation with you, but they been finding creative ways to make graphics, to make videos to get messages out there for us". Loose relationships, where organisations were attending the steering group quarterly, have been built on and they are now seen twice a week.

Erdington NNS feel that they were lucky to be stable as an organisation at the start of the pandemic. Funders continued to pay them, even though they were unable to deliver on their original contracted aims, due to trust built between the organisations. Therefore they were able to move capacity rather than lose it. One of their funders, TAWS Active Communities, re-profiled what they were asking for in May, requesting a focus on food, befriending and wellbeing, which fitted perfectly with what the NNS were doing. The Department of Health contract that Witton Lodge had was around social prescribing – delivering food came under this and so they had their best performing quarter. Due to the re-profiling, they were able to move two members of Witton Lodge staff to the NNS, as they didn't need to furlough them. If these two contracts had not continued to support the work of the NNS, they would not have been able to deliver the level of response that they have done. Existing grants were repurposed, negotiated and re-profiled around the emergency response. They were also able to secure a National Lottery COVID-19 support fund grant, but no extra staff or capacity which could be helpful for future crises.

Rob Netherway, Flourishing Community Services Manager at Witton Lodge said

"When you talk about an emergency response, you wouldn't imagine that you'd need an arts based organisation with you, but they been finding creative ways to make graphics, to make videos to get messages out there for us".

Case Study 10

Bahu Trust The (Hazrat Sultan) Bahu Trust is a registered national UK charity, founded and based in Balsall Heath, which aims to support local communities. While it is a Muslim organisation, with education and spirituality at its core, the Trust recognises the potential of dynamic and confident communities "that is meaningful, productive and constructive in a modern British context". The organisation was founded in 1983 due to the community demanding the attention of local authorities, to deal with rising local crime issues. From their inception, the Bahu Trust has been heavily involved in rebuilding the local community and community activism. While they were not as prominent as churches in the area during the rebuilding of the 1980s, the Trust feels their role in the community has grown, and the pandemic has highlighted their vital role as mosques have "really stepped up to the demands of local communities".

The Bahu Trust, as a part of a wider response by places of faith, provided services to support their communities through a variety of means. As soon at the lockdown began they began expanding their food provision services, provided direct support to the NHS, and crucially built new relationships within the community to provide support that they hope will continue in the long term. The pandemic had a transformative effect, with the mosque

"breaking out of the four walls and reaching out to the community, and the community becoming the mosque."

Very early on in the crisis, the Bahu Trust began a delivery service for food and basic necessities which served both those who were high risk and those who were simply unable to access the basics due to panic buying. The Trust already had a food bank, which served as a framework, but in this new "taskforce", there was a combination of the Trust staff and young people.

They publicised their services online and through their community network links, with a specific email address and phone number for all requests (see attached image). They saw a huge demand coming through this email address, leading them to support their local community and anchor institutions. In particular, a direct call to help from the Penn Hospital, Wolverhampton. These NHS staff were unable to get food or necessities due to their newly demanding hours and often empty shelves. The Bahu Trust supplied over 80 care packages of food and toiletries to those NHS staff.

They also built new relationships with the local fire station where they delivered care packages. The relationship has been very fruitful and they anticipate the fire service maintaining that relationship. For example, they have plans for the service to give safety talks at Friday prayer and they have requested a stall in the space to educate the local community on fire safety. This co-production was formed as a result of the crisis but has the promise of continuing.

Working with the local police force and council to discuss issues and look for a combined response is not something that would have happened as easily before the pandemic. Though they did have a relatively positive relation with the police since their former Imam

has recently become a West Midlands police officer. However, the realisation of the vital work of mosques in the local area that has made the local statutory bodies realise that "everyone benefits from working together". Overall this has made the mosque feel more like partners with the other local authorities; "we're partners in the… wider scheme of things… we're all in it together".

The relationship with the Local Authority is mixed, while the LA staff are engaged and happy to talk, the support the Trust provides outweighs the support they receive in return. An example of this was creation of a new communication space through the coordination of weekly Zoom calls by the Bahu Trust. The meetings took place between themselves, the Director of Public Health for Birmingham City Council and 35 local mosques. These were arranged because of local authority concerns around large gatherings being held over the important Muslim holidays of Eid (23rd-24th May) and Ramadan (23rd April – 23rd May). The Trust worked hard to reach out to a variety of mosques in the area and bring them into the weekly calls so they could be informed of the guidelines and as an opportunity for mosques to feedback to the local authority. Practically, this involved a member from the Bahu Trust going directly into the council house to establish their Zoom accounts and train council staff. The Trust also fund the Premium Zoom account that allows these meetings to take place, but they have "always wanted to share and co-produce; it's useful and saves money!"

It is worth noting that this measure is a remarkable achievement that could not have happened without the Bahu Trust's facilitation. For comparison, just before lockdown, Birmingham City Council had tried to call a physical meeting with local mosques and there were only four attendees. Prior to lockdown there was no umbrella organisation to coordinate everyone, so this informal network that has grown out from the weekly briefings is a fantastic example of new and innovative collaboration.

The Trust demonstrated excellent partnership with the local authority and other organisations throughout their response to the crisis. However, they also voiced concerns that the efforts of the faith sector would be forgotten after the immediate crisis. Similarly, although relationships with the council have strengthened, the representative from the Trust was concerned that

"when the tide turns we may be forgotten again … you'd be the talk of the town for when the [LA and police] need you, but as soon as the issue goes away the engagement declines".

Sadly, the Trust felt that they had received no evidence of recognition or support from local or constituency elected representatives, despite reaching out directly; *"it was a great time for them to shine but we got nothing".* In the case of the Bahu Trust, they were the facilitators; their efforts to bring together a collective of mosques for the benefit of all was deeply appreciated by other mosques. The meetings were even cited as a useful tool for managing the crisis by another interview participant.

"breaking out of the four walls and reaching out to the community, and the community becoming the mosque."

"we've always wanted to share and co-produce; it's useful and saves money!"

Case Study 11

Hope for the community CIC, Coventry
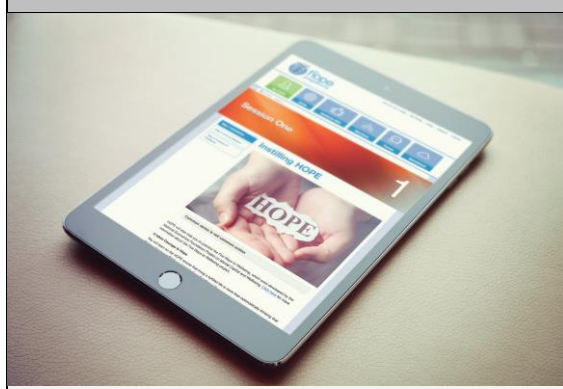
Overview: Hope For The Community, Community Interest Company (H4C), is an award winning social enterprise, set up to provide affordable, co-created, evidence-based products and services to empower people to manage their health and wellbeing. The company was co-founded in 2015 by Professor Andy Turner and four community members, Tina Malin, Wendy Dingley, Dave McHattie and Vicky Harker. These four

amazing people attended the Hope Programme, then became facilitators and trainers, then company directors.

H4C flagship product, the Hope Programme, is a 6-week face-to-face and digital self-management course based on positive psychology, mindfulness and cognitive behavioural therapy, built on 20 years of research evidence. The programme targets individuals living with or affected by long-term conditions such as cancer, autism, dementia, depression, HIV and multiple sclerosis giving them the necessary tools to manage their wellbeing and to cope with the emotional and social consequences of living with conditions that have no cure and are more prevalent in more deprived groups.

All the versions of the Hope Programme are co-created with the users, focussing on people's strengths. Delivered face-to-face or digitally, enabling a wider reach and equal accessibility co-designed to be peer delivered thus reducing costs and adding social value.

In 2016 a study showed that the Hope Programme for 25 people living with multiple sclerosis led to improved scores in several outcome measures including distress, mood, fatigue and self-efficacy. In 2019 a study involving 101 parents of children with autism spectrum condition showed improvements in depression, anxiety, and positive mental wellbeing. 2020 study with over 100 cancer survivors has shown that an online peer-delivered self-management programme version of the Hope Programme can help with cancer-related quality of life and mental wellbeing outcomes..

Key work during Covid-19: Most of H4C courses were delivered in-person. All this provision was cancelled due to COVID-19 restrictions. Key partners (Macmillan Cancer Support, NHS and Carers Trust) had to furlough hundreds of staff or had limited capacity to provide alternative support to in-person delivery. H4C redirected all resources into finding solutions to help their partners meet the needs of the vulnerable groups they support – working with academic experts to include COVID-19 related resources; training new facilitators and making sure the H4C technology platform was ready to deliver quality courses.

Since the end of March, over 1,200 cancer survivors, people living with cancer, MS or other physical or mental conditions, parents of autistic children and children with cancer across the UK took part in the online Hope Programmes. In collaboration with Coventry University, H4C managed two feasibility randomised control trials to evaluate the online programmes and sought feedback for continuous improvement of the course from participants. The results showed positive outcomes comparable to in-person delivery (40% reduction in anxiety/depression and 40% increase in ability to manage).

"COVID -19 has impacted on people affected by cancer, and it has stopped our face to face support. The tools the Hope course offers would have vanished for at least 6 months without the online version. It has been crucial that it is accessible to all to enable a sense of stability and focus in difficult times"

- Debbie Smith, Macmillan Cancer Information and Support Centre Manager at Wythenshawe Hospital.

Working with Carers Trust Heart of England

Most families that have a member with autism spectrum disorder were directly impacted by the pandemic. Routines and available services were disrupted. Schools closed, connections with service providers lost and many were concerned about contracting the virus.

In partnership with Carers Trust Heart of England and new collaboration with Caring Together and Northamptonshire Carers H4C secured a £10,000 grant from the Carers Trust fund, a response to the pandemic fund, supporting and piloting innovation across the UK. As part of the project they trained 10 new online facilitators and jointly delivered 6 online Hope Programme courses to 414 parents between May and September 2020. All courses filled up within 48 hours and to meet the demand, course sizes were increased to 70 parents. Initial evaluation has shown parents' significant improvements in positive mental wellbeing, reduction in depression and anxiety.

Looking after a family member in post lockdown period can have a significant impact on carers' own mental health - stress, anxiety and depression are common symptoms. In July 2020 Coventry City Council commissioned development of new version of the Hope Programme (Hope for Carers) to fill the gap in lack of self-management support for carers.

"The reason the Hope Programme has been so successful is because of the foundations, learning from the research to improve the programme and outcomes for parent carers. This has led to investment from our Local Authority to develop the course further, so that it can be adapted and offered to all carers in Coventry and Warwickshire, and we are working towards this becoming nationally available. This work will have long term benefits in the years to come." - Sonja Woodhouse, CEO Carers Trust Heart of England

Working with Macmillan Cancer Support

The global pandemic has had a serious impact on many people, including cancer survivors their families, and caregivers. Cancer diagnosis brings uncertainty and the lockdown has increased anxiety and insecurity in many people diagnosed with cancer.

Working with Macmillan Cancer Support H4C delivered 6 online courses to 352 cancer survivors between April and October 2020. H4C trained 8 new facilitators and delivered a feasibility randomised control trial showing promising improvements in anxiety, depression and patient activation.

The positive outcomes not only result in health care savings but provide crucially needed support:

"COVID -19 has impacted on people affected by cancer, and it has stopped our face to face support. The tools the Hope course offers would have vanished for at least 6 months without the online version. It has been crucial that it is accessible to all to enable a sense of stability and focus in difficult times" - Debbie Smith, Macmillan Cancer Information and Support Centre Manager at Wythenshawe Hospital.

Working with the NHS

An online Hope Programme has been set up and offered to all those participants that

have been affected by cancelled or delayed in-person courses and the remaining spaces offered to people from across the South West. 60 participants attended the digital Hope Programme with positive health and wellbeing outcomes Giving HOPE to many throughout lockdown. Following the successful pilot, the NHS commissioned further delivery of digital courses and adapting the delivery of the in-person provision to virtual model via MS Teams, which will be available across three new areas.

H4C had already piloted, albeit on a small scale the digital programme in previous years as such the platform was already in place for this to take place. This year has seen a 651% uptake in the online Hope Programme compared to last.

The partnerships and collaborations were underpinned by high level of trust combined with strong evidence base and necessary safeguarding procedures already in place, this meant that H4C were able to move the Hope programme online easily. The partners had direct access to the patients/clients and so could recruit participants directly.

Additionally, with many people having been furloughed or reduced to working part time, the pool of volunteer facilitators available increased building capacity for delivery.

Case Study 12

Auriga Services

Auriga Services Ltd operates as a Public Benefit Entity and is a wholly owned trading subsidiary of Severn Trent Water Charitable Trust Fund which was founded in 1997. They employ 75 staff delivering financial grants, white goods, income maximisation realisation and debt advice to over 1,000 people every day across the UK. Since the inception of the charity, over 2 million people have been helped. Auriga's mission is to 'Change lives every day" and has a vision of creating "3 million healthy homes by 2020".

During the crisis, demand for financial assistance rose and Auriga noticed a significant increase in the duration and number of telephone calls seeking assistance (Service is provided by phone, email, webchat, letter and on-line portals).

All Auriga staff transitioned from office to home working immediately prior to the formal lock down, and all service levels were maintained throughout the period whilst keeping staff safe and well. In addition, staff numbers increased by more than 7% during the pandemic to meet the additional demand.

Auriga noticed that people during COVID-19 changed from contacting about historic debt to needing financial aid right now. More staff were recruited to manage the increased workload, especially the growth in phone calls from individuals seeking money advice and immediate grants during COVID-19. As people suffer from isolation, they have tended to want to talk more.

Although Auriga had, over the last 5 years reduced the application turnaround time from

21 days to 2 days, during the crisis they managed to transfer payments/ vouchers on the same day. Severn Trent Water responded by increasing the number of people who could benefit from their social tariff. This tariff reduces bills by up to 90% - reducing an average £350 bill down to £35. Severn Trent Water have pledged to help up to an additional 10,000 people through the scheme, as well as additional support through other schemes, within the Severn Trent Water region.

Of particular interest is the need for support for young carers in particular, where young carers are significantly more at-risk during crisis such as, COVID-19.

1.   Re young carers. They noticed that many;
•   are not reporting their change of circumstances to Job Centre plus or DWP
•   do not understand the eligibility criteria for Carer's Allowance and need help filling in the application form. Same applies to other support, like Council Tax reduction.
•   do not know how to handle household bills and budgeting
•   there is very little support to help carers combine their caring responsibilities with their studies or with paid work.

2.   Also in terms of health, they are not being recognised as someone who needs support and their own health problems aren't being addressed. During Covid-19 in particular we know that;
•   their health suffered.
•   assessments of young carers health needs have been less likely to take place in lockdown.
•   we come across many carers in our renal and Inherited Medical Disorders welfare work. Carers have had problems accessing medication for themselves and their families during lockdown, and it impacts on their health.

3.   During lockdown it was also a risk doing the shopping for the family. We hear a lot of young carers;
•   needed to enter the supermarket to do the shopping and some were denied access - due to no identification to say they are a carer.
•   this had a major impact on them and their families.

The results of a survey they undertook is on the news part of the Auriga website - https://www.aurigaservices.co.uk/impact/news/

As a result of the increase in calls and people in need of support right now, Thames Water handed over a significant additional cash injection to the Thames Water Trust Fund, administered by Midlands-based public benefit entity Auriga Services to help vulnerable customers struggling to pay their water bills and charges during the coronavirus pandemic.

As a result of the COVID19 outbreak, Thames Water has doubled its donation from £0.5m to £1m to the Thames Water Trust Fund, which helps individuals who are suffering financial hardship in the Thames Water area.

In addition, Thames Water is increasing its Customer Assistance Fund from £3.4 million to £4 million. The combined total of £5 million will be a major help to customers in financial

hardship and will enable qualifying customers to pay off debts on their water bills and assist with flexible payment plans.

These funds will be fully managed and delivered by Auriga Services – which already helps over 1,000 people every day who are experiencing financial hardship by administering the trust funds of Severn Trent Water, United Utilities and the British Gas Energy Trust Fund. The generous cash boost includes personal contributions from the company's Chairman, Chief Finance Officer and various members of the executive leadership team. The independent Thames Water Trust Fund, which is funded by the company's shareholders, provides grants to third sector organisations, such as Citizens Advice Bureau, who offer Thames Water customers long-term support and free debt advice.

Mark Abrams, chief executive of Auriga Services, comments: "We are delighted that Thames Water has added to their generous Trust Fund donation. This will allow us to help significantly more people who have been financially affected by coronavirus to have access to extra support during such challenging times."

Ten essential innovations from the case studies

BrowseAloud, Coventry (Vignette 2)

Adoption of innovative 'BrowseAloud' technology by the Building Bridges app to share and make accessible crucial health advice about COVID-19 for asylum seekers, refugees, migrants and communities with limited English language. Helping keep excluded communities safer.

Faithful Friends network, Sandwell (Case 1)

A church-established multi-faith network using social media, YouTube etc. to provide a space for faith community engagement. This pre-existing work and, crucially, good relationships, facilitated rapid mobilisation in response to COVID-19 and excellent partnership with Sandwell Public Health to share key messages.

Lockdown Lunches and Grow Your Own At Home, Wolverhampton (Case 4)

A rapid response by Hope Community, Heath Town, in the immediate weeks of the crisis, providing hot meals for the elderly, and ethnically diverse community, as well as a social connection and wellbeing check in and support. In partnership with WMBC and WVSC.

Rapid Funding of TAWS, Birmingham (Case 6)

TAWS built a business plan for BCC, resulting in a £600,000 contract with Fareshare, with food to be distributed by TAWS and the network of #BrumTogether partnership, from early April. The Birmingham depot reached over 21,000 people every week. Unprecedented level of coordination between faith, voluntary and community organisations in the city.

Wear and Share project (Case 6)

A good example of identifying new needs, here food delivers noticed that individuals and families lacked sufficient clothing: resulting in a collaboration between TAWS and various partners to provide clothing to vulnerable people. Aston Villa FC helped store clothes ready for delivery.

Food Justice Network (Case 6)

As a result of TAWS' various activities, and renewed appreciation of underlying inequalities. The network aims to secure better food supply, bringing together food banks and other partners in #Brum Together, working together to identify lasting solutions to food poverty.

Boost My Happy grants for digital inclusion (Case 7)

As part of their effort to shift their work to online, St Basils secured funding from Land Aid to encourage Young People engaged with their service to 'Boost their Happy' through purchases of laptops or tablets, enabling the service to work more digitally and creatively.

Erdington NNS – Mutual Aid collaboration (Case 9)

Erdington NNS liaised with local churches and community organisations able to support individuals with bereavement, including discussing ways to continue providing services remotely. Some of Erdington NNS-funded assets have provided support services such as bereavement and counselling, and the creation of a 'Bereavement Café'. They also created an Emergency Asset Register, a directory of support organisations for front-line workers, and identified service gaps.

'Everyone In', Birmingham (Case 3)

Unprecedented collaboration between MHCLG funding, Birmingham City Council and homelessness charities to bring rough sleepers off the streets – over 70 people had been placed in temporary accommodation by April. Based on very strong existing relationships but also "everyone just dropped their own boundaries and just focused on the need."

Auriga, West Midlands (Case 12)

Adapted rapidly to both the requirements of working online and maintaining service continuity, while addressing new needs including immediate financial assistance, and particularly the complexities facing particular groups such as young carers and health conditions.

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6. Key learning points from across the research

Following the completion of the rapid interviews and the case studies of innovation and flexibility, we began to surface cross-cutting themes. Ultimately we were looking for evidence that contributed towards the development of "emerging ideas" for re-imagination and rebuilding. The themes presented here emerged from an 'inductive' review of the evidence (i.e. where themes emerge organically from the evidence), compiled through the wide range of interviews carried out by the team, whilst being cognisant of WMCA's interest in identifying:

- ideas for public-private-voluntary co-production, particularly in relation to public service reform and systems change;
- areas which would benefit from developing deliberative exercises, like *citizens assemblies*, *citizens juries* or *neighbourhood alliances* to identify priorities
- neighbourhoods which are starting to develop hyper-local recovery plans, or setting out a new vision for their area.
- opportunities to transfer local assets such as recently closed pubs and shops to community ownership.

Ultimately we hope the themes encourage learning from all phases of the response, and sub-sectors of civil society the social economy, by highlighting key challenges and issues that have emerged in the complex responses to the crisis.

Research theme one: key issues surfaced in the response to COVID-19

These are mostly, though not solely, issues of a shorter-term nature. They emerged as issues or their implications became clear in the initial few weeks following the crisis and lockdown.

Agility and urgency, the need for flexibility

- ESOL, language and communication: Key messages being lost. Information not reaching diverse communities. Needing to get information out in different languages or to different faith communities.

- Influx of volunteers from community – but those smaller organisations based in the community already were more effective than national schemes/ GoodSams etc

- Fewer "strings" attached/less bureaucracy for smaller groups to get money from statutory bodies; "we could move quickly because of the lack of red tape – did not have to do all the form filling – very efficient" (Base 25).

- Some good joined up working: "it's knocked down walls really" – and "have cut through red tape that would normally have taken years" (Birmingham MIND).

- Alongside the contributions of specific Faith Based Organisations, wider faith communities and places of worship have a wealth of often locally-rooted human

resources that usually (though not always) have a readiness to provide volunteer help in meeting crisis needs

- Ban on evictions, albeit short term: *"It showed that it can be done, there is no excuse now is there for anyone to not have access to accommodation" (St Basils).*

Highlighting inequalities and the impact of poverty

- Loss of jobs and income leads to financial hardship: "need for help right now" (Citizen's Advice Wolverhampton).

- Wider recognition that BAME communities were harder hit, with also the consequence, given the ethnic composition of both minority and Christian faith communities in the region, that the impact was also substantially felt among faith community groups.

- "We need to better align services with communities" (Birmingham Councillor).

- "Need to change the way the 'system works' – need to humble ourselves, and nurture the networking and partnership working to include and be respectful of communities. This will help to drive out inequalities" (Birmingham Councillor)

Identifying vulnerable individuals and communities and new needs

- One unintended (and unexpected) consequence was that through providing Covid19 specific services, often door to door, a huge number of individuals who had additional support needs, but who had previously not accessed services, were identified.

- The Covid-19 crisis has been a catalyst to work with the people who have "slipped through the net" (Northfield Community Partnership).

- Substance Misuse & Homelessness charity: doing assessments on street which had never been done before.

- More intensive community-based activities of smaller groups drew people in.

- "When we went virtual we attracted a different audience" (Compton care)

Research theme two: COVID-adapted service delivery implications

These are mostly, though not solely, issues of a medium-term nature. They emerged as issues or their implications became clear in the months following the initial crisis, and as society began to gradually reopen following lockdown.

Digital inclusion and exclusion

Online resources and social media were excellent ways of communicating in lockdown. Zoom enabled round the clock access to advice and support services.

- Online chat services for those needing advice or with limited English.

- A "hybrid mode of delivery" (Refugee and Migrant Council): telephone, webchats, text, video, leaflets.

- Wolverhampton Domestic Violence Forum: "The virtual world has widened our platform".

- For staff: issues around availability of laptops for home working, H&S checks etc.

- Most deprived were often without WiFi or access to IT equipment and thus ended up even more excluded. Also "many people have smartphones, but it's about platforms, who in a household gets to use the computer, etc" (Fircroft College).

- Cost of internet can be prohibitive for vulnerable families: "that's a food shop" (Citizen's Advice Wolverhampton).

Tension between lockdown/social distancing and need to provide face to face support

- Worries about vulnerable young people in lockdown and Refugees and Asylum seekers – some organisations could not shut down altogether.

- Need to maintain some contact with those in absolute crisis– safely inside or in outside settings.

- Issues around access to PPE for those providing frontline services.

- Some vulnerable groups (DV) needed continued peer to peer support – "to trust who they are talking to - otherwise they won't engage" (Wolverhampton Domestic Violence Forum).

Wellbeing and mental health in the sector and communities

- Be concerned about staff as well as service users.

- "The recognition of the impact of Covid19 on MH needs to be sustained, and the renewed focus on prevention has been welcomed. Need to ensure that every person has access to a 'place that is safe' (albeit a virtual, on-line, or telephone 'place')" (Birmingham MIND)

- "Not being able to meet other people will have an impact on grief and isolation… we continue to support people but can't replace the human connection on such as sensitive subject" (Compton Care).

Design of COVID-specific services:

- Medication and Food security: initial responses centred around food delivery, through development of Food Hubs, supported by public and private donations; some issues around cultural appropriateness of food parcels.

- Design and provision of indoor activities: Bags of Play, Grow your own at Home, Arts and Craft, Pictures form your Window, Creative Factory, armchair exercises for the elderly.

- Telephone befriending/ Support for isolation: particularly around MH and wellbeing for those shielding and socially isolated.

Research theme three: cross-sector, system, and longer term policy implications

These are mostly, though not solely, issues of a longer-term nature. They emerged as issues or their implications became clear in the summer and early autumn months, as we moved into a period uneasily described as the 'new normal'.

Multi-organisational collaboration and partnerships

- Highly variable. When this worked well, it worked very well, but there is also evidence of centralisation.

- Some areas had weekly stakeholder meetings to coordinate community responses in collaboration described as "unprecedented" (Birmingham Council of Faiths), with "far more communication and greater voice collectively, promoting collaboration and different voices, from across different parts of the sector" (Crisis).

- Sometimes there was tension between bigger and smaller organisations: larger charities were more likely to furlough staff and "pull back" – leaving smaller organisations to "step into this space" (Hope Community, Wolverhampton).

- Where some services provided by faith communities seemed to be more internally focused (eg. food deliveries), this should be understood in the context of some wider services not always providing for these communities in religiously and culturally appropriate ways.

- Larger organisations could provide risk management for smaller organisations

- Demonstrable role for infrastructure organisations in supporting and coordinating the collective effort

- "The resilience has been stripped from statutory services and we need to tap into the plethora of resources in the community" (Birmingham Councillor).

Funding COVID-specific services and redirecting funding

- National organisations and LAs used central funds to provide crisis grants to local small organisations.

- Flexibility of the statutory bodies in the provision of funding has been of huge benefit to the sector; an easier relationship with bureaucracy.

- Small orgs often did not need large sums – just little pots – but many found it hard to access and had to use their reserves.

Locking in the learning: sustaining trust and local knowledge, and co-productive approaches

- Opportunities to engage with a wider group of service users has led to some organisations rethinking their services, engaging these communities in dialogue about what is needed.

- "We need to understand communities by engaging with people with lived experience" (Birmingham Councillor).

- Breaking down previously existing barriers/ the transformative effect of COVID: a mosque able to "break out of the four walls and reach out to the community" (Bahu Trust).

- Community organisations already visible and trusted – with local knowledge - were the ones vulnerable people looked to for help. "The networks were already there, they just needed resources – 'no need to reinvent the wheel'" (Northfield Community Partnership)

- "Let's share our resources, let's co-produce, because we benefit a lot more and we save money" (Bahu Trust).

Uncertain recovery and anxiety about the future

- Fear that when Covid-19 has gone away, things will go back to normal and the local focus will disappear.

- Fear of re-centralisation and moving away "from need to work with the grain and build on existing good practice" (Fircroft college).

- Need to avoid 'the "didn't communities do well" and therefore just abandon them without support' or funding!

- "The combined authority has a huge opportunity to create a new narrative" (Birmingham Education Partnership)

- "How we say thank you to volunteers – our appreciation as a city?" (Hall Green NSS).

- "We hope that faith organisations are given the recognition they deserve… they were a key part of the response to the crisis and that needs to be remembered" (Birmingham Council of Faiths).

- Big jumps in unemployment, especially youth unemployment.

Summary

The above themes were presented at the Working Group on 9th September, and we asked the participants to rank the importance and salience of the themes. The 'top three' themes were:

- Agility of the response

- Highlighting inequalities

- Digital inclusion / exclusion

These themes, emerging directly from the information collected during the interviews and reflection on the issues highlighted by the case studies - presented and further refined at the Working Group - form the basis of our recommendations presented in section 6.

We suggest these represent a secure basis for thinking about priorities for the future, and key areas for WMCA to focus strategic thinking and policy development.

7. Recommendations

The recommendations presented here were surfaced and discussed amongst the team in the first week of September 2020, underpinned by reflection on the key learning themes (Section 4) following the completion of the case studies and research interviews. We presented a version of these emerging recommendations in the second part of the online Working Group (9th September 2020), and invited comment and discussion from the participants, to whom we give especial thanks. What follows is a revised set of recommendations following the very thoughtful and considered feedback and discussion in that session.

The recommendations intend to highlight the key areas identified in the study as being important considerations for the West Midlands Combined Authority as we move into the next phase of the crisis and beyond. Our recommendations are based on a principle of 'building back better' rather than returning to previous ways of working – recognising that much of what we have seen and heard throughout our study has highlighted the potential of civil society and the social economy to make a significant contribution to the way in which the region recovers.
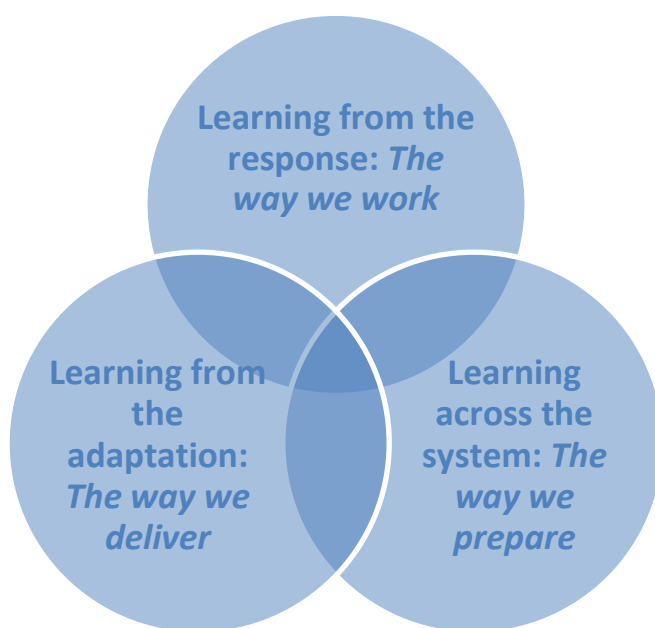
Recommendations Theme One: The way we work – *collaboration and beyond*

Leadership

Reflecting learning on: agility, urgency, the sharing economy and the jettisoning of informality

'Distributed' leadership during the crisis has meant that communities and organisations have been able to respond quickly and effectively. To empower leaders from across civil society and the social economy, we recommend the WMCA play a role in supporting:

- Opportunities for leaders from within civil society and the social economy to meet, discuss and share information in a spirit of collaboration

- Affordable and accessible opportunities for leaders from across civil society and the social economy to further develop their skills

- Trust in civil society leaders; listen to their views, build in mechanisms to engage with them and trust that they will 'do the right thing' (as demonstrated throughout the crisis)

- The determination not to return to 'command and control' leadership; facilitate and enhance the work of the social economy, rather than control.

Collaboration and partnership working

Reflecting learning on: rapid collaboration, mutuality, and the shunning of 'red tape' and 'professional arrogance'

The high levels of collaborative working throughout the crisis have been commented on widely by the people we spoke to. In many cases, this built upon pre-existing partnerships, indeed it was often remarked that existing partnership working and relationships were a crucial underpinning, less commonly it was an entirely new experience. This applied as much to the faith community as to large voluntary organisations.

Where collaborative partnership working happened, there is no doubt that it enhanced the response. Where it did not, it became a significant barrier. Collaboration between the public sector and civil society and the social economy needs to be central to the way we work, and should be the 'default' and not the 'nice to have'.

The WMCA and its partners can play a significant role in this, building trust and confidence through promoting across the public service system:

- Regular communication

- Continued transparency and information sharing

- An assumption that the civil society and social economy sector is an equal partner

The crisis has also created numerous opportunities for organisations to work closely with each other, sharing resources and putting aside 'professional arrogance' or boundaries and silo working that have been increasingly prevalent in the sector, in large part due to commissioning processes that have forced organisations into competition. Whilst in many ways the onus rests with organisations from across the voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise sector to build on this experience and guard against moving back into 'old ways' of working, we think that the WMCA can support this through developing and advocating:

- Commissioning frameworks (at a national, regional and local level) that encourage collaboration, rather than drive competition; recognising that those most vulnerable in our society often have multiple and complex needs that are best served by organisations working together

Getting the bureaucracy 'right'

Reflecting learning on: rapid collaboration, mutuality, and the shunning of 'red tape' and 'professional arrogance'

A key enabling factor during the crisis has been the apparent removal of 'red tape and bureaucracy' experienced by organisations operating in civil society and the social economy. This has allowed for more innovation and flexibility in service delivery. It is not suggested that all bureaucracy is removed, clearly some policies and process are there for very good reason (many mentioned safeguarding as an example), however we would recommend that there is a clearer focus on determining the 'right level' of bureaucracy for a given situation.

Recommendations Theme Two: The way we deliver in a COVID-19 world

Recognising the different but equally valuable contributions of the range of organisations across civil society and the social economy; delivering at different times, to different people

Reflecting learning on: the diversity of response, and enhanced trust across the entire sector and beyond

During the crisis we have seen a remarkable response from all corners of the sector. From hyper-local mutual aid groups, through to national campaigning organisations – and everything in between. Each have played a significant part in the response, and as our framework suggests, have been important at different phases of the response. As a result this collective effort has been far stronger. We need to learn from the crisis and explore how we can value and harness the individual contributions to this collective effort. In many ways this is crucial area for reflection and learning within civil society and the social economy itself, but the WMCA and its partners could support the sector to do better by:

- Creating opportunities for VCSFE groups, both formal and informal to build on recent experiences and energy and identify how organisations can continue to work together and support one another

- Recognise that not all parts of the response will need to be sustained indefinitely, but could be reactivated quickly if needed (for instance mutual aid groups); supporting other kinds of organisations to work with them productively in future. Maintain a 'collective memory' of how this response could be co-ordinated

- Recognise and value the input of 'all voices' within the sector – including faith-based organisations - and ensure that they reach out to the less visible grass-roots organisations (acknowledging that many of these organisations are run entirely by volunteers and do not have the resource or capacity to engage in traditional ways)

- Invest in strengthening infrastructure support for the sector, perhaps particularly in its traditional but much neglected role in promoting and supporting volunteering.

Resourceful *and* resilient

Reflecting learning on: finding and valuing inherent strengths in communities, individuals and hyper-local organisations

The sector has been defined in its response by its flexibility, adaptability and ability to respond with real urgency to the crisis. This speaks to its inherently 'resourceful' nature, and perhaps less to ideas of 'resilience' in crisis. However, it also highlights the level of latent social capital that 'sprang into action' during lockdown and made communities more resilient. We can learn from this resourcefulness and the resilience that has been demonstrated, and build upon it.

The WMCA and its partners can support this though directing and shaping:

- Investment in community development that builds on the learning from Covid19 – creating stronger, more connected communities that are then well placed to respond to future crisis

- Promotion of employment policy and practice that supports flexible working and actively encourages working-age people to volunteer.

Hearing the voices – from communities and from those with lived experience

Reflecting learning on: the crucial value and contribution of lived experience

Many of the people we spoke to stressed how important the voices of communities – and those with lived experience – were in developing appropriate solutions. It is apparent that without these voices, there is a risk that service design will not meet needs. We would recommend that the WMCA and its partners develop an explicit commitment to promote service user involvement in the design, delivery and evaluation of services across the region and across multiple domains of public service delivery.

This could include:

- Further development and expansion of the citizens panel to ensure voices of those from marginalised groups are included; using the sector who already engage regularly as a conduit to accessing appropriately supported individuals with lived experience

- Building on the 2017 *Mayor and Faith Action Plan*, to learn the lessons arising from the COVID crisis and the wider voluntary and community sector responses to it as highlighted in this report, and to incorporate this learning in a further development of the Action Plan as a strategic framework for engagement between the faith communities, WMCA and the Mayor through the newly planned faith strategic partnership group.

- Agreeing and promoting minimum levels of participatory practice; building on the literature about effective participation to ensure individuals are supported in making an active contribution.

Digital is important, but it is not the panacea – face to face matters

Reflecting learning on: the huge positives of 'going online' for engaging with people, with corresponding downsides of digital divides and the excluded

We have heard a lot about how organisations were able to transform their services into on-line equivalents; to offer training and support through applications such as Zoom and Teams, telephone befriending services and help lines and how they have quickly set up whatsapp and facebook groups to organise food delivery and medical supplies.

Through this, the 'digital divide' has become ever more apparent. This is both at an organisational and individual level. More must be done to ensure that individuals have access to digital solutions – particularly during this period of continued restrictions and social distancing. Lockdown has shown that 'digital exclusion' means more than being offline, or having absolutely no digital skills. Lack of personal access to suitable devices and 'data poverty' are also major factors.

The WMCA can support this through:

- Link the region to national strategies and initiatives; for example the DevicesDotNow initiative

- A regional Digital Inclusion strategy, which draws from the evidence from this research about the complexity of digital inclusion for marginalised communities

- Explore the opportunity for the WMCA to provide data packages to those experiencing data exclusion, in the same way that they provide the scratch off day travel passes to homeless people.

However, we also heard a strong message that 'digital' cannot be the only answer. We must recognise that digital inclusion or exclusion is highly nuanced – the provision of a laptop, for example, does not mean that an individual can automatically engage. Therefore, we need to help organisations (large and small) plan for and prepare for future disruption to services and acknowledge that this support may need to be about delivering services face to face in the *safest way possible;* a shift from risk aversion to risk embracing. The WMCA could support this by:

- Developing comprehensive advice and guidance to organisations and employers on developing appropriate risk, health and safety measures

Recommendations Theme Three: The way we prepare

The uncertainty of funding for the sector – shaping investment for readiness

Reflecting learning on: the financial impact of the crisis and the manifold creative, but still uncertain responses of individual organisations

The research has detailed that both regionally and nationally civil society and the social economy has been negatively impacted upon. The short to medium term outlook financially for many organisations is bleak, and as we move out of furlough the sector is likely to see significant reductions in the work-force and in delivery of services. Unrestricted income through fundraising and trading income has been significantly reduced, and many organisations are seeing cuts to their regular funding streams.

Given the very significant role that the sector has played in the response to Covid19 it is imperative that organisations are supported through this challenging time. This is important not only to retain some of the critical front-line services they deliver, but also to ensure that the sector as a whole can strengthen and support the communities they serve.

Consideration should also be given as to how small, unregistered, entities can access small grants to support delivery at the local level. Extremely small 'pots' of funding can have a significant impact, but many organisations of this ilk, as well as social enterprises, are often excluded from accessing funding.

The WMCA can support this by:

- Introducing a Regional Stabilisation Fund for civil society and the social economy to support recovery and ensure work can continue

- Consider developing a more accessible funding mechanism for very small grass roots organisations and social enterprises to support local level activity.

Staff well-being and resilience

Reflecting learning on: the very real risk of burnout within organisations and the hidden stresses on individuals, particularly as the pandemic endures and re-surges

Many of the organisations that we spoke to reported that their staff had continued to work 'on the front line' throughout the crisis, whilst those unable to do so (due to shielding for themselves or others in their households) became the delivery staff for the on-line solutions. Whilst some larger organisations did take advantage of the furlough scheme, this was less true of smaller organisations. The result is that many staff have worked in extreme circumstances, at considerable pace, over a prolonged period and continue to do so. As with the national research, we have found evidence of the inevitable impact on staff health, well-being and resilience.

There is a need to ensure that this is both acknowledged and addressed. Staff need to be given the right support to ensure that their personal resilience is strengthened and that they are supported to carry out their day to day duties.

In particular it should be recognised that small organisations struggle to provide funding for training of staff to safeguard not only their clients but their staff and volunteers wellbeing. Inadequate support, training and information exacerbates feelings of anxiety, ability to cope with stressful situations and to understand procedures for dealing with crisis. One example, of addressing these needs is Coventry City Council, in recognition of the growing numbers of local small organisations and volunteers that were supporting asylum seekers and refugees, engaged the refugee council in providing training for over 60 voluntary sector employees and volunteers, to equip them with the skills, resources and referral process to support the specific needs of these individuals but also to learn how to cope with the personal impact of supporting individuals with complex needs who disclose information that can be shocking to hear.

Building on the current Thrive at Work initiative, the WMCA has a critical role to play in ensuring that staff, and also volunteers, are given this support. We would recommend that:

- WMCA commission training and capacity building for volunteers and small organisations who would struggle to fund this themselves.

- WMCA work with the sector to facilitate shared learning, training and capacity building amongst organisations, drawing on the expertise in areas including Adverse Childhood Experience (ACEs) and Psychologically Informed Environments (PIE) and other trauma-informed practice

- WMCA develop a strategic relationship with well-being providers, such as the on-line tool HeadSpace or equivalent that can then be offered to staff in the sector at discounted rates.

Matching demand and supply – a strategy for volunteering and social action

Reflecting learning on: the mismatch between 'top-down' volunteering iniatives, and capacity constraints in local coordination

Whilst the response from the public has been extraordinary, it has also created logistical challenges and this has been particularly true with well-meaning national initiatives such as the NHS GoodSam initiative. This has resulted in a huge influx of new 'volunteers' that have not been utilised – leaving many feeling under-valued and disillusioned.

It is vital that we carefully plan for, and manage, the volunteer response in future. Whilst the recently published Kruger report (2020) suggests a national volunteering platform, our evidence would suggest that this is not the most appropriate route. Local volunteers (often not recognising themselves as volunteers) have been a key part to the response, with very little – if any – central coordination. Similarly, although reflecting a slightly different perspective, there are real concerns among faith groups that the Kruger report might frame their approach to issues in society as being purely "charitable"/voluntaristic and not concerned with having a voice on structural issues.

However, there is also an argument to support an additional layer of volunteering which may require broader coordination, particularly as we move into a new situation and as people who may have volunteered whilst being furloughed return to work.

The WMCA and its partners can support this through:

- Exploring the development of a strategy for volunteering and social action, bringing VCS infrastructure organisations into a dialogue about how this can best be developed and supported.

Mental health, wellbeing, skills and employment – and the disproportionate impact on those already facing inequality

Reflecting learning on: the central role of civil society in identifying and calling out new needs and raising its voice against inequality

Many of the organisations we have talked to have worked on the front-line during the crisis, supporting many of our most vulnerable citizens. As a sector, these organisations were already acutely aware of the inequalities endured by particular groups and report these as having been exacerbated further through the pandemic. This, it is felt, will only get worse and there is urgency in trying to find ways of combatting these inequalities.

Civil society and the social economy should be key partners in addressing these concerns. Organisations already have a wealth of knowledge, expertise and 'reach' into disadvantaged communities and individuals. They can support the WMCA by bringing this knowledge into policy design and development, and this offer should be embraced by the WMCA.

Key issues highlighted throughout this research include a potential mental health and wellbeing epidemic, acute poverty and a lack of employment opportunities. The WMCA could work with the civil society and the social economy to:

- Develop and facilitate proven Thematic Partnerships (as employed as part of the C19 Support Brum Partnership in Birmingham) that brings together leaders from across the civil society with particular areas of expertise (i.e. domestic violence, mental health, disabilities, homelessness) to support policy development

Connect the social economy with the private sector to co-produce solutions to social inequalities highlighted during the pandemic, and in particular focus on the anticipated economic and social impact as we move forward. This needs to go beyond the 'social value model' of procurement.

8. Summary

The West Midlands has been the hardest hit region outside London in terms of COVID-19 cases and deaths, and many reports indicate that it will suffer the worst economic and social impact in the coming months and years.

The West Midlands has seen an incredible response from mutual aid, faith and community groups, neighbourhood groups and the social economy, and this came through strongly throughout our rapid research project, with many participants at all stages commenting on the agility and urgency of civil society and social economy organisations in responding to the challenges of the COVID-19 crisis. There was also a strong sense that collaboration came out strongly as a positive of the response, with new found flexibilities and a willingness to get things done in a very challenging situation. And there is substantial solidarity across this diverse sector and the sense of a 're-set' in relationships between organisations and with the public sector.

We have drawn attention, through our rapid review of the still-developing literature of responsive reports, the idea that different parts of the social sector have responded in different ways, at different times, and at particular intensities over the course of the crisis and onwards into a period of uncertain recovery. What this suggests is the need to recognise that just as there hasn't been a 'one size-fits all' response, we should resist any urge to create simplistic overarching policy for the sector in the region.

A nuanced policy response will therefore fully acknowledge the incredible diversity of civil society and the social economy, which ultimately is one of its key strengths. We seek to capture these insights in the framework presented in section 2, and welcome the opportunity to test this framework with WMCA to explore whether it presents a helpful way to think about investing in resilient and resourceful responses to future challenges.

Indeed, in highlighting our emerging findings to project participants, including partners at WMCA, we heard powerfully that they prioritized the findings around agility and urgency, the role of civil society in its broadest sense in highlighting inequalities and poverty, and the newfound awareness of concerns about the emergence of new forms of digital exclusion. This is a strong message from participants from within the social sector on their priorities. There was equally a sense that WMCA has a role to play in sustaining these positive collaborations, nourishing relationships, and providing a setting for information sharing and building a platform for opportunities for new collaborations.

We also hope that the set of twelve 'illuminating' case studies provide a sense of some of the greater depth to these key issues and highlight the huge range of best practice around 'innovation, enterprise and flexibility' in VCFSE responses to the crisis. We aimed to provide as much coverage of different parts of the sector (for example, from grassroots to major charities, and from Christian to Muslim faith-based initiatives); different fields and sub-sectors, and to provide a flavour of the different responses in different geographical areas of

the region – but even here we are probably only 'scratching the surface'! We suggest this is a good platform for further conversations and research. There has undoubtedly been innovation and experimentation in co-production (particularly with local communities), new spaces for deliberation and engagement, and new freedoms and flexibilities. But we are aware that these 'positives' of the crisis are potentially vulnerable, and we stress the need to 'build back better'.

A key challenge for WMCA and all stakeholders in civil society and the social economy is to understand what needs to be sustained, brought forward, and what works in helping this to happen ('the how' bit). Finally therefore, our final recommendations are absolutely rooted in the principle of 'building back better' and are centred on three themes:

The way we work – collaboration and beyond

- Leadership

- Collaboration and partnership working

- Getting the bureaucracy 'right'

The way we deliver

- Recognising the different but equally valuable contributions of the range of organisations across civil society and the social economy; delivering at different times, to different people

- Building a resourceful *and* resilient civil society and social economy

- Hearing the diverse voices within civil society

- Digital is important, but face to face will continue to matter

The way we prepare

- The uncertainty of funding for the sector – shaping investment for readiness

- Staff well-being and resilience

- Matching demand and supply – a strategy for volunteering and social action

- Preparing for increased need particularly relating to mental health, wellbeing, skills and employment

We very much look forward to further engagement with WMCA in terms of refining these recommendations in order that they maximise their impact and relevance to the civil society and social economy sector in the West Midlands.

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Appendices

Appendix A: detailed methods and ethical considerations

The methodology proceeds in three main stages:

Stage one: Rapid evidence review

In order to produce an overview on the impact on and response of the VCFSE we conducted a **desk-based evidence review** to address all of the key themes of interest to WMCA (outlined briefly in the introduction). In week 1 we submitted the ethics review at the University of Wolverhampton, formalised the themes of interest and inputted this directly into the design of interview schedules and focus group topic guides. This resulted in a discrete output (approximately 2000 words draft report) that was shared with WMCA on the 18 August.

Stage two: Evidence gathering including the collation of case studies of 'innovation, enterprise and flexibility'

1) During week 2 the project team conducted a **rapid email call for evidence** of good practice case studies, targeted through the partner's contact lists and networks.

2) This was followed from week 3 onwards by a **round of approximately 30 rapid stakeholder telephone interviews**. The project team focused on different themes, scales (local authority or neighbourhood) and geographical locales.

3) Case studies were chosen in order to ensure coverage and generalisability. Indicatively, the case studies will demonstrate diversity including coverage of: different service fields, scales and locality, diversity of ethnicity/faith communities, and highlight examples of co-production, mutual aid, partnership.

4) Following final case study selection, we carried out a round of **longer semi-structured in-depth interviews** with one key person within each case.

5) Following the completion of most of the case studies, thematic review by the team members was carried out, covering issues such as the impact of mutual aid on existing social action, and tensions and emerging synergies.

Stage three: Surfacing and co-produced synthesis of ideas for reconfiguration and rebuilding

The principal mechanism for surfacing and further co-producing the findings and recommendations was through an online Working Group in order to share emerging findings, which was held on 9 September.

We invited working group participants from the interviewees contacted in both the initial round of rapid stakeholder interviews, and the longer semi-structured case study interviews, as well as opening it up more widely via the aforementioned networks including those with a more strategic overview in the West Midlands. We collated findings in real time from the focus group and the resulting material was again thematically analysed and presented within the summary report (sections 6 and 7). The final desk-based task took place in the last week, focused on drawing together all of the proceeding stages and emerging outputs to produce the draft report.

Summary: Overall the research interventions in this project are:

- Email call for evidence, results collated by team

- Twenty rapid telephone interviews (30 mins each), interview notes produced and securely stored by team

- 6-8 in depth interviews with individuals in case studies, short case study write-ups to go directly into the report

- One online working group, results to feed directly into report.

Appendix B: Summary of reports consulted

International	
Faith and COVID-19: Resource Repository	This is a "living" (ie. electronically updated) on-line international resource repository of learnings from and resources for faith engagements with the COVID-19 crisis, maintained by the Berkley Centre's for Religion, Peace and World Affairs of Georgetown University, USA; World Faiths Development Dialogue Learning; and the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities. It draws on global evidence and advice in relation to faith communities and COVID-19 and is regularly updated and accessible at: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1FLxwvN6ICTxWWYOwRiv9sBLgf7v0vstsSzV7_o_1-B8/edit#

Multi-Religious Faith-in-Action COVID-19 Initiative Reference Document for Religious Leaders and Faith Communities Guidance, Ed 1, April 2020	This is also a "living" (ie electronically updated) document produced by the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities that draws on global evidence and advice targeted specifically on faith leaderships and is accessible at: https://jliflc.com/resources/multi-religious-faith-in-action-covid-19-initiative-reference-document-ed-1/
National	
Rapid research COVID-19, How will communities respond to and recover from this crisis? Briefing 1 (Local Trust/TSRC/Sheffield Hallam (April 2020)):	This report is a precursor to research being carried out on how communities respond to COVID-19. "The idea that a community can withstand shocks if it is 'resilient' does not recognise how communities are nested within wider power structures that largely shape their fate". Particular focus seems to be on "Community Resilience", "Social Capital" and "Social identify and Group membership".
Rapid research COVID-19, Blending formal and informal community responses. Briefing 4 (Local Trust/TSRC/Sheffield Hallam (August 2020))	Informal responses have been useful but not able to rise to the scale of the pandemic; access to additional funding has enhanced the ability of the informal responses; pre-existing networks have been beneficial to the responses.

COVID-19 crisis and charities (HoC Digital, Culture, Media and Sports Committee)	Contribution of charities to respond to needs of most vulnerable is now more critical than ever; Charity workers as "real heroes" but individual efforts are not enough; some are fighting for survival – traditional funding dried up – "smaller charities are at imminent risk of closure if adequate support is not provided"; support from gov welcome but probably not enough, prioritises health and social care, and lacks transparency – small charities may lose out. Committee calls for a comprehensive stabilisation fund. *'Many charities perform **vital work** supporting the vulnerable in society. Their contribution is needed now more than ever as the country responds to the challenge of Covid-19. Charity workers are some of the real heroes of the response to the pandemic, with many working with great courage on the frontline of the crisis. Yet many charities are **fighting for survival**. Traditional methods of generating income have dried up overnight. Social distancing is making delivering services harder and more costly. Reserves are running out. Smaller charities, in particular, are at risk of imminent closure if adequate support is not provided'* (DCMS Committee Report: *Covid-19 crisis and Charity,* 2020, Pg. 3).
Care goes viral: care theory and research confront the global COVID-19 pandemic (Fine and Tronto, International Journal of Care and Caring)	Care as "Political": care can be seen as political. The success – or otherwise – of responses to the pandemic can all be traced back to decisions about how care 'has been enabled, supported, managed and matched to needs' in that society. Critical care theory – care as a feminist issue – but also about improvements in health and infectious diseases being a thing of the past (in Western countries). COVID-19 (amongst others) challenges that optimism – and highlights the failure of some approaches to care (and notably deferral to the market). Calls for more research in order to address how we can 'use the opportunity to make matters of care, both large and small, more central to how we allocate values and resources, as individuals, as societies and as a global community' (p7).

Digital Health Hubs: An evaluation for the NHS Widening Digital Participation Programme (Good Things Foundation, WSA Community Consultants)	Needs to be responsive to community needs; addresses people's aspirations; concentrates on building relationships and through that, trust; this encourages learning and improvements to health. To do this Hubs need to assess community needs, create welcoming, safe spaces "that draw people in", involves staff and volunteers reflecting on needs (WHY NOT COMMUNITIES THEMSELVES??); digital champions (representative of community, trained to give peer support); develop partnerships with local health bodies; based in the community; finance for sustainability an issue.
Citizen and community led recovery and resilience (BVSC and Birmingham City Council)	Community-lead response was immediate; proactive engagement of VCS, strong social capital in Brum, best when not over-managed, willingness to challenge the system, desire to continue to work together, tackled difficult issue such as food security, PPE, commissioning, Link to Council's structures showed the need for improvement. Children's partnership provided funding vulnerable groups and families, built on strong LA/VCS partnerships; challenges "historic public sector behaviour" towards VCS.

Key challenges: disproportionate impact on BAME; how do we keep this level of connectivity post-covid; "Do we really mean "recovery"- or do we work for something better?" |

Somewhere over the rainbow – third sector research in and beyond coronavirus (Macmillan, R. (2020) Voluntary Sector Review, vol 11, no 2, 129–136)	- How to make sense of coronavirus – how we look at the "re-cast roles, positions and contributions of voluntary action and civil society" (Pg. 129) Observes that the rhetoric from Got has been about the 'gentleness of charities' (references Rishi Shunak's speech) – which belies the broad range of activities and services provided by the third sector. 'At this time, when many are hurting and tired and confined, we need the gentleness of charities in our lives. It gives us hope. It makes us stronger. And it reminds us: we depend on each other' (Sunak, 2020 on p 130) The word "gentleness" is more reflective of Conservative values (neoliberalism?) and 'misunderstands and undervalues the work of many organisations working at the sharp edge with the most vulnerable and marginalised communities' (p130). Identifies a three dimensional crisis facing charities: resourcing, operation and demand (pg. 130) 1. Resourcing: early research indicating the trading income has collapsed, funding uncertain, philanthropic giving is being cut etc. Charities expecting average reduction in income of 31% (Institute of Fundraising et al, 2020) 2. Operations: 9 out of 10 charities expect Covid19 to have a negative impact on being able to achieve charitable objectives 3. Demand: Demand/need has intensified and become more complex Theoretically – crisis draws attention to bigger questions of continuity and change in the sector. How do we conceptualise this? Macmillan offers the following: - Micro (practice) Level – how staff, vols, trustees enact their roles (i.e. social distancing, technology, service re-design) - Meso (organisational) level – survival, challenges and opportunities, flexibility - Macro (societal) level – what is the call to the third sector, how to they vary internationally, does the crisis present a critical juncture that may shift the apparent enduring path dependency of civil society regimes?

Ultimately – where does the third sector 'sit' in the new normal??

"The coronavirus may be creating the conditions for a new and comprehensive social contract, akin to the social and economic reconstruction in the aftermath of the second world war. What roles might the third sector and civil society play in advancing, but also in some cases resisting, this process." (Pg. 134)

Multiple sources of income have fallen away (charity shops, venue hire, philanthropic donations, face to face donations). Anticipate a 31% decline in annual income which includes a 48% fall in voluntary income (Institute of Fundraising et al, 2020).

Staff activity and operations affected by lockdown and shielding. 9/10 charities expect COVID to have a negative effect on meeting their charitable objectives. Social distancing having the biggest impact on their operations whilst need and demand intensifies (p131).

Looks at the **"tension-field" boundaries** that sit between the third sector and the state/ community/ markets has become looser:

- New "COVID neighbourhood-based community groups' emerging on Facebook and WhatsApp to provide help to the vulnerable.

- NHS Volunteer Responders

- Fundraising efforts – such as Captain Tom

Key questions:

- 'Whether and how local authorities and more established voluntary and community organisations link up with these new grassroots initiatives' (p132). And why are the community-led responses different in different geographical locations?

- The appropriateness of, and role for, volunteers in the public services.

- The 'moving frontier' and balance between charitable support and public funding and provision.

	• Is Coronavirus an opportunity for social and economic reconstruction and the reordering of assumptions and priorities?
	Is COVID a "micro event" as described in Field Theory - one 'which destabilises and creates a sense of generalised crisis in all fields across whole societies?' (p133).
	'How will the ongoing use of technology reshape existing relationships between different kinds of stakeholders, for example between paid staff and volunteers?
	How might a rapid 'channel shift' away from face-to-face contact affect access to services, potentially creating new forms of exclusion?
	Will a newfound interest in flexibility and informality in emergency response work continue as the immediate crisis subsides, or will more formal and managerial approaches gradually be reasserted?' (p133)

'Taking some control' Briefing 6 on the challenges faced by VCSE leaders during Covid-19 Crisis (IVAR, Ben Cairns, Emily Dyson, Liz Firth, Rebecca Moran (11 June 2020) https://www.ivar.org.uk/briefing-paper/taking-some-control/)	Identified 4 key issues: • The uncertainty of future funding (impact on economy and knock on impact on future funding; funders having different priorities; having capacity to write new bids and also difficult when future so uncertain; funding decisions being delayed) • Staff welfare and morale (burnout, fear and fatigue; building in self-care, developing new ways to communicate) • Balancing the opportunities and limitations of virtual service provision (understanding the potential opportunities but balancing this with lack of therapeutic qualities of online support and difficulties in engaging new beneficiaries) • The organisations strategic direction. (how much energy to put into this) Leaders having to respond to changing and increasing needs of SU's; managing risks of reopening and shaping services (with social distancing); supporting staff. Also increased concern about rising vulnerabilities/inequalities (and longer term impact). Leaders also feeling isolated. "what is becoming clearer by the day is that VCSE leaders expect to have to consider the implications and impact of Covid19 on their organisations, services and beneficiaries for the foreseeable future. For now, attention is beginning to turn to some of the hard questions about what will be required to delivery on their missions in this new context. Most believe that the size and shape of their organisations and services will need to change, possibly dramatically" (Pg. 5)

'Time for Flexibility' Briefing 7 on the challenges faced by VCSE Leaders during the Covid-19 Crisis (IVAR, Ben Cairns, Emily Dyson, Liz Firth, Rebecca Moran (30 June 2020))	Three key issues remain: mid to long term funding, balancing immediate needs of staff and beneficiaries with the long term future of the organisations and thinking flexibly Emerging as the lockdown eases are managing 'split views' amongst staff about returning to work; increasingly issues also about furloughing, redundancy and restructure, or reducing wages. In terms of flexibility some key things that are developing are ideas around: new collaborations, new services and new approaches. "leaders continue to think and act with speed and flexibility in response to the challenges being thrown at them" (Pg. 4) Includes: • Finding new ways to listen to, and consult with beneficiaries • Reviewing organisational strategy (shifting business models, exploring opportunities to diversify…..and considering things like mergers) • Exploring collaborations and partnerships • Looking at ways to cover core costs (liquidising assets etc.) • Recruiting/training new volunteers (Pg. 5) 4 Pressing support needs identified (for leaders) • A sounding board • Opportunities to strengthen the sector's collective voice • Supportive funder relationships • Agile, trust-based funding

'Finding a Way Forward' Briefing 8 on the challenges faced by VCSE Leaders during Covid-19 Crisis (IVAR, Ben Cairns, Emily Dyson, Liz firth and Rebecca Moran (21 July 2020))	Serious concerns about the 'most vulnerable'; ongoing adaptations of day to day service delivery (although many staff remain furloughed); loss of income widespread and long term prospects bleak; organisations 'stretched' with limited time for strategic thinking. 3 key issues: • The wellbeing of staff and themselves (leaders) • Range of issues around re-establishing services • Ensuring the sectors role and contribution is visible "If we don't survive, who else will do this work?" (Pg. 5)

Briefing 1: Rapid Research Covid19 – How will communities respond to and recover from the crisis? (Dr Rob MacMillan, Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research, Sheffield Hallam University)	Key points: - Community responses to a significant and destabilising macro-event like Covid19 are an essential form of civil repair. - The idea that a community has to be resilient, does not recognise how communities are nested within wider power structures that largely shape their fate - May be more important to measure 'networks' rather than social capital - Key factor is a shared identity and being 'in it together' but this may wane over time (particularly as inequalities emerge more and more) - So, a question could be how the emergence of Covid19 support networks is strengthened and sustained as the crisis unfolds. Study offers real time insights from the Big Local areas (20) and other communities (5): uses a conceptual framework previously used by TSRC to frame the impact of the 2008 global financial crisis. Views the pandemic as a 'significant macro event which destabilises and creates a sense of generalised crisis is all fields across whole societies' (Pg. 3) and that "in these times of crisis civil society may be engaged in various forms of civil repair to mend otherwise torn social fabrics and broken solidarities" (Pg. 3) - A starting point is to consider the idea of community resilience (and how communities withstand, adapt and bounce back from adversity) – but to also think about how they might 'bounce forward' – i.e. for things to be better in the future because of the 'unsettlement' - Main conceptual framework underpinning much research in the areas remains Social capital: often seen as a valuable but latent resource "in essence the argument is that community responses to crisis involve mobilising existing and newly formed networks amongst friends, neighbours and wider community members, and that responses are stronger in communities characterised by higher levels of trust, alongside the existence of common codes and norms" (Pg4) BUT Macmillan points out that this is a contested framework – and that other researchers look to more concrete measurable matters such as social networks – and how

	they respond in phases
	- This framework allows consideration of how new groups form and continue in crisis situations.
	Three questions for further reflection emerge:
	- How should we think about how different communities are responding to Covid19? Is it a case of demonstrating and building community resilience, or is it highlighting something else, such as resourcefulness, or collaborative connections with other stakeholders and public authorities?
	- How important is the variable density of existing community networks and strengths of social infrastructure?
	- How might the emergence of new Covid-19 support networks be strengthened and sustained as the crisis unfolds?

| Community Responses in times of Crisis – Glimpses into the past, present and future (Wyler, Steve Local Trust, Creative Commons, (April 2020) ISBN: 978-1-9162638-1-9) | Paper tracks community responses to crisis; from the plague to local floods and "explores how crisis can transform social structures and how Covid19 could play this role in Britain's future." (Pg. 3) Also reviews the Big Local responses (150 areas) to the crisis.

Over 4000 mutual aid groups emerged (Pg. 6) + thousands of existing community associations and charities and social enterprises + other Facebook groups, WhatsApp groups etc.

"I have seen how, at their best, community efforts can make a vital difference to a national crisis response, ameliorating some of the worst impacts, especially among the poorest and the most vulnerable, and helping people rediscover their common humanity" (Pg. 41)

In respect of the established big local areas….

"This is especially the case if, over time, trust and relationships have been built widely and repeatedly across a neighbourhood. And even more so, where there has been a culture and practice of seeking out local strengths and encouraging people to contribute in their own right" (pg. 64)

4 big questions:

- Beyond the crisis – what kind of leadership will prevail (we have seen increased command and control in recent weeks V the early distributed leadership of the community response)

- Will the relationship with the state change? Will the state come to expect more of citizens? Will they help to create conditions for people to contribute?

- Who will bear brunt of disaster – inequality, financial impact etc.?

- Can we continue to take community for granted?

"…many national commentators have noticed that people have self-organised, using social media platforms in particular, without, it seems waiting for governmental bodies, or even local charities and voluntary organisations, to tell them what to do or organise them……" (pg. 69)…"But I am not sure that this is the whole story. When I have spoken to people immersed in the community responses, I have been struck by the significance of local relationships between residents and also between organisations and with public and private sectors as well. And how valuable these are proving in the current crisis." (Pg. 70) ….."where |

they are desired, they must be constructed, symbolically and socially, by residents themselves" (importance here of the community anchor role)

- If we want to harness the 'renewable energy of communities' we need to understand better the necessary conditions for communities to emerge, and for self-organisation to flourish
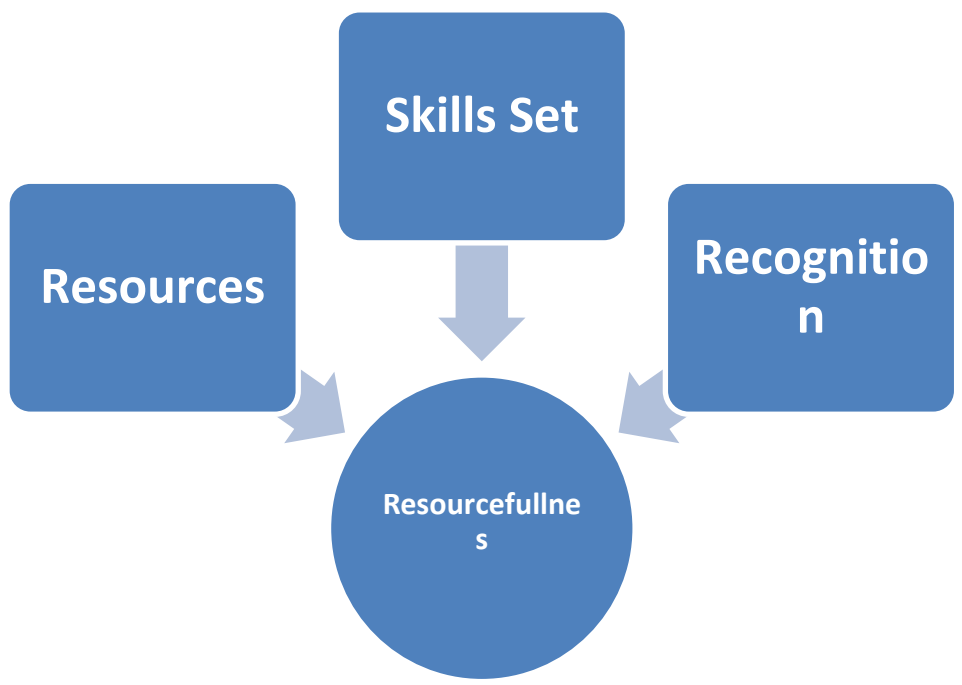
Local Trust Briefing 2: Rapid Research, Covid19: Community Resilience or Resourcefulness? (Angus McCabe, Mandy Wilson and Rob Macmillan)	- Aims to develop understanding of ideas about resourcefulness as an alternative to 'resilience' - Idea of 'resilience' implies coping with or managing; in contrast resourcefulness suggests a more pro-active capacity to develop creative solutions - Communities have been resourceful in developing creative ways of bringing both financial and human resource together, using skills and tech knowledge In policy terms: Cabinet Office 2019 'Community Resilience Development Framework' – introduces policy language of 'prepare, respond, recover' (pg. 2) Alternative model of resourcefulness – "promotes idea that communities have the capacity to engage in dialogue, develop alternative agenda and challenge existing power relations" (pg. 2) – as an ongoing process – particular relevance to principles, ethos and objectives of Big Local. Framework – Mackinnon and Derickson Using this model to review Big Local:

	1. Resources – small hardship groups/use of community assets etc.
	2. Skills/Technical Knowledge – zoom meetings, training on line, financial/emotional support
	3. Applying local/cultural knowledge – use knowledge as a conduit between local authority provision and community access to support; unearthed local community spirit; community connectors
	4. Promoting recognition – evidence of new self-confidence; key points of connectivity
	Big Local experience provides some starting points to reimaging how the future could look
	- Urgent need to demonstrate explicitly to policy makers this ability to mobilise resources
	- No current evidence of policy makers including this thinking in recovery plans
	- Need to explore nature of and relationships between informal and formal approaches to making things happen at community level
	- Possibilities for collaborative connection with wider VCS infrastructure and public bodies
	- Different understandings attached to volunteering vis-à-vis community action

Briefing 3 Rapid Research Covid19 Grass Roots Action: The role of informal community activity in responding to crisis (TSRC and Sheffield Hallam University Local Trust; Dr Rob Macmillan, Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research (July 2020))	Key Points: - Rather than occupying parallel worlds, informal and formal practices and systems can be seen and blended in all kinds of orgs/ - Community responses seen as 'first responders' – tend to emerge when traditional approaches are delayed, insufficient or inappropriate - Value of informal approaches mirrored by concern re lack of coordination, reach and accountability - Literature on disaster responses contrasts centralised control and command model (which tends to see informal community responses as a nuisance and a problem-solving model which sees them as a legitimate contribution in a decentralised response system - Questions around how informal groups are sparked and sustained; how they relate to formal groups and local public bodies Framework (Whittaker et al, 2015 359-60, cited Macmillan pg. 3) 4 kinds of organisational responses: - Established organisations undertaking existing routine work - Expanding organisations, carrying out their usual tasks in new ways/structures to meet demand - Extending organisations, taking on new roles - Emergent organisations, new groups/structures carrying out new tasks Discussion suggests three main questions: 1. Contributions – what has been the role, value and challenges of informal community activity during the crisis, such as through mutual aid support groups? 2. Collaborations – what have been the relationships between informal community activity and the formal response systems involving local authorities, health services, and established

	voluntary sector agencies?
	3. Connections – How, in practice, do broader community responses for Covid19 combine aspects of informal and formal working structure, and to what extent do they act as cogs of connection (Locality, 2020, 12) or authentic intermediaries. (Pg. 5)

Garden Mind – An eco-system view of change and a different role for the state (Goss, Sue (July 2020), Compass)	"In the UK we have one of the most centralised government systems in the world. Our system is not only unkind and uncaring, but unsafe. We are learning, to our cost, that cutting such a system to the bone creates a fragility that cannot withstand the challenges of Covid19, let alone what is to come." (Pg. 4) - Need to move away from the 'machine mind' to a 'garden mind' – to thinking about society as eco-systems/organisms that are highly interdependent and connected – and within this you can reconceptualise the role of the state - Need a resourceful, powerful state able to redistribute wealth, to organise resources and prevent harm BUT we need to see them as caretakers/gardeners rather than machines. "We know that the most creative ideas emerge from community organisations and the voluntary sector; that self-organising offers a dignity, a space for self-realisation, and an ability to give meaning to our lives that receiving state service does not. The emergence, in the Covid19 pandemic, of new mutual-aid groups, the rush to volunteer, the strength of mutual support has shown us that we have always had the capacity to self-organise" (Pg. 11) BUT "the voluntary sector has become increasingly a client of, and dependent on, government grants and government action. We are so used to being 'done to' that our behaviours often reflect that." (Pg. 11) - Need collaborative leadership/systems leaders – distributed leadership and power is more democratic and more resilient - Need to be radical/need disturbance Suggests that we need to: - Work on the dynamics of the system – exploring ways to create self-balancing, distributive…sustainable systems - Create space for self-organising and conditions for it to flourish - Shift mind-sets – make relationships, tell stories, education, make space

Communities Vs Coronavirus – The Rise of Mutual Aid (Luca Tiratelli and Simon Kaye; New Local Government Action, (July 2020) London	Reflects on hyper-local spontaneous efforts of communities. Comments on how these efforts differ from traditional 'helper and helped' relationships (prevalent in traditional public services and charities) – rather they obey "deeper obligations of mutualism"
	Big question – is this only available in a crisis?
	Makes recommendations as to how to sustain – or repeat it – should lockdown happen again (or other crisis)
	Key Points
	- Mutual aid groups have been crucial to Covid19 response
	- MAGs illustrate wider potential of community power
	- Reveal importance of attitude of local Govt
	- Identifies that where social capital is more developed, or working age people have more time – MAGS function with ease
	- Central Govt struggles to connect with mutual aid groups
	Makes some recommendations
	1. Councils should play a facilitating role as MAGs evolve (with creativity, trust, and above all a clear understanding of the value of MAG's)
	2. The creation of a community support financial package for local government to invest in community development
	3. Employment policy and practice that supports flexible working, giving working-age people more time to volunteer (Pgs. 8-9)
	"Mutual aid groups can be defined as 'self-organising groups where people come together to address a shared health or social issue through mutual support." (Pg. 10)
	- 4000 MAG's evolved; estimated 3m participants (covidmutualaid.org/local)
	- Emerge in different ways (dependent on urban/rural, tech capacity, etc.)
	- Furlough was VITAL to Covid19 MAG response as freed up working age people (with relevant skills) to do something

	- Main things that MAG's have done: food distribution, errands ,shopping, picking up prescriptions etc.; then a focus on activities (book clubs, on line classes) and then on combatting loneliness - Extremely agile and responsive - Worked best when supported by Local Authorities/Councils – but not over-managed (so best when LA's facilitated networks, introduced people to each other etc.) – some LA's literally ignored the MAG's which was also unhelpful. This was most successful in areas where the councils had already begun working more closely with communities. - "A practical and light touch approach produces the best results" (Pg. 27) "This means that those seeking to build community-led models of public service delivery need to be mindful of proactively building social capital and community assets, and of mobilising communities as a first step in any process of redesign" (Pg. 30)

Real Time Evaluation of Leeds Neighbourhood Networks (Centre for Aging Better, July 2020)	Organisation supports older people to live independently. Support focussed on medication, food, essential items and access to social and emotional support. 37 local NN's in Leeds area. Some NN's took "community hub" role needs of wider community (vulnerable families etc.). Challenges and opportunities: – Intensification of work and the burden on key members of staff – Tension between addressing needs of the whole community and the older people, their specialist focus. – An increase in the reach and visibility of the LNNs - LNNs are not at immediate risk of financial crisis, but they do have some concerns about longer-term sustainability as the pandemic continues.
Pro-bono economics/Civil Society weekly tracking survey	• Rapid shift in service delivery: **58%** say that they have 'reduced activity in a significant way'; **90%** see a negative impact of covid-19 on their ability to deliver on objectives in next 6 months (down from 92% on 28-29 Apr)[Source: Pro-bono economics/Civil Society weekly tracking survey, 16-17 June, N=184] • Key Issues facing leaders: the well-being of staff and themselves, how to safely reinstate services/adapt services; ensuring that the sectors role and contribution is visible, uncertainty of future funding, capacity to look to the future strategic direction, increased demand [Source: IVAR Briefings 6 – 8 June/July 2020) • Organisational sustainability? **93%** predict a reduction in income in the next 6 mths, But **75%** say unlikely/very unlikely that they won't be operating in 6 mths [Source: Pro-bono economics/Civil Society weekly tracking survey, 16-17 June, N=184]
Covid-19 The Contribution of Neighbourhood Network Schemes in Birmingham (Benita Wishart, BVSC)	Includes Age Concern Birm; POWhER, Disability Resource Centre, Family Service gateway; Whitton Lodge Community Assoc; Accord Housing; Karis Neighbour Scheme; Soho First. Decision- making was taken back by the centre to coordinate response with weekly zoom meetings, 5/10 NNS's given grants. Removed some tasks (Death and dying) and prioritised others (Medication and Food and tackling isolation) Created hotline/ telephone befriending/ online creative activities. Identified 6 "Wicked Issues": MH, Digital literacy, Benefits, Transport, Care support, Bereavement services. Lessons include Cultural competence, opportunities for connection and investment in and recognition of assets. The response of the VCFSE

	sector and the civil society mobilisation has been incredible
The Relationship Project, 2020	<u>Trusted collaborations: Changing relationships within the VCS?</u> • Focus on meeting needs, not on organisational requirements/positions • Providing a collective voice • Emerges out of period of more intense competition • Shaped by pre-existing (trust) relationships *"The most comprehensive and successful social responses have been highly collaborative and the best collaborations have emerged in areas where there were pre-existing structures and relationships" (The Relationship Project, 2020)* • Collaboration, but also discussion of consolidation and mergers
Harriet Sherwood, Keeping the faith: religion in the UK amid coronavirus, 3 July 2020	Informed by a survey and published as places of worship prepared to initially reopen after more than three months of lockdown, the article charts the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on faith communities in the UK. https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2020/jul/03/keeping-the-faith-religion-in-the-uk-amid-coronavirus

Commission for Countering Extremism, COVID-19: How hateful extremists are exploiting the pandemic, April 2020	The Commission's report brings together relevant data about England and Wales at the start and throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. This particularly highlights the conspiracy theories that exist around the pandemic, how they contribute to extremism and how extremists use such theories. This includes attention to the presence of anti-vaccine sentiment in some of the groups most vulnerable to COVID-19. Overall, the report draws attention, in an evidenced-based way, to the fact that: "The short- and long-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic could create conditions conducive for extremism. Extremists will seek to capitalise on this to cause further long-term instability, fear and division in Britain. The socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic will present significant extremism risks, both in scale and impact and it is vital that the Government refocuses its efforts to counter extremism." https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/906724/CCE_Briefing_Note_001.pdf
Office for National Statistics Coronavirus (COVID-19) related mortality by religion, ethnicity and disability: England and Wales, 2 March 2020 to 15 May 2020	Given the disproportionate impact of the virus on particular groups within society which have themselves also been mobilising initiatives in relation to COVID-19's direct and side-effects, this data release by the Office for National Statistics provides important contextual information for understanding some of the responses from within these groups. As stated on the ONS website, this data release provided: "a descriptive overview of deaths related to coronavirus (COVID-19) among people identifying by religion group, ethnic group and also disability status. It includes death counts, age-standardised rates and odds ratios by age and sex for religion groups, ethnic groups and also for those restricted or not restricted in daily activities. https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/coronavirus-covid-19-related-mortality-by-religion-ethnicity-and-disability-england-and-wales-2-march-2020-to-15-may-2020
West Midlands cases in national reports	

We Were Built For This (Locality)	Study carried out in 7 places (Berwick, Bristol, Coventry, Grimsby, London, Manchester and Thetford) compiling 57 community respondents.
	Findings: Existing social infrastructure has been vital• Well-functioning local systems have emerged• The role of community organisations as "cogs of connection" has been strengthened• Community organisations have adapted at pace – but need support to meet the challenges of the future
	Opportunities: create "Power partnerships" between local communities and councils; shift from competitive tendering to community collaboration; put communities at the heart of devolution "turn community spirit into community power" to lead social change:
	"Our economy should support our community, not the other way round" (p8);
	"The rates of death in our most deprived places are over double those in the least deprived" (p8)
	The post-covid period is an opportunity to transform – policy-makers can build on the innovations and make this the "new normal" or "snuff them out" (p9).
	"The Conservative Manifesto in 2019 pledged £150m to create a new Community Ownership Fund. We believe this fund can be the start of something transformational. With more ambitious scale and scope, it can turbocharge the community ownership agenda and create the foundations of a community-powered recovery" (p16)

	• …with: each other (collective voice); funders / commissioners (flexibility and trust); and public bodies (collaboration)
	- strategic recognition of some VCOs by LAs & others
	  - **'Partnership of necessity'** but emerging from period of 'antagonistic collaboration' => local variations, shaped by existing relationships?
	  - **'Cogs of connection'** *'…connecting people up with a range*

	of different services, and bridging the different layers of response – from grassroots mutual aid, to city or county wide statutory provision…' [Locality, 'We were built for this', June 2020]

| We Were Built For This; Moat House Community Trust (pages 45 – 48) | "Responding to the lockdown, Moat House Community Trust have transformed their "Grub Hub" service, an affordable social-eating community pantry for local families. Partnering with businesses, other community organisations, the council and other public agencies, they rolled the model out across the city on a delivery basis. There is hope that the enhanced partnership working throughout the crisis will be sustained for the recovery, with a renewed commitment from the public sector to building community infrastructure" (p45).

Their partnership working with local CCG, police, LA and public health have been pivotal: "Those relationships we have built up, the trust is the basis of the work that we are doing in response to the crisis" (p46).

They liquidated their assets to access cash flow. They adapted the "Grub Hub" (social eating community pantry providing affordable meals to local families) to a delivery service across social housing estates (in partnership with 'Sky Blues' Coventry FC charity). In partnership with the council, they were also able to bring together all the different elements of food provision in the city – the foodbank, Grub Hub and the local authority-provided food parcels – to reduce duplication and streamline access to support. They have now rolled out the Grub Hub model with other community organisations in the city and are planning how it might continue to form part of a sustainable food model post-coronavirus, as people continue to struggle financially. |

Community Responses in times of Crisis – Glimpses into the past, present and future (Wyler, Steve Local Trust, Creative Commons, (April 2020) ISBN: 978-1-9162638-1-9). This report/study is summarised above. Here we summarise the relevant West Midlands specific content.	Drawing lessons from the past: The Plague (1665); The Food crisis (1790's); The Spanish Flu (1918-9); The Great depression (1930's); The Great Flood of 1953 and recent floods 2019-20. These have shown that 'at their best, community efforts can make a vital difference to a national crisis response, ameliorating some of the worst impacts, especially among the poorest and the most vulnerable, and helping people rediscover their common humanity' (p41). Asks the question about how communities have responded to COVID-19 crisis 'especially in the least affluent places' (p41). Bases research on case studies. Ones from West Midlands is below. **Overall conclusions:** 'Community responses can be fast, generous and compassionate, and reach people who would otherwise be forgotten or neglected, in ways which are very much more difficult for more formal public, private or even voluntary institutions to achieve' (p63). This is especially the case if trust and relationships already exist within a community. There is always tension between local authority and community action. However this crisis shows we need "all hands on deck". Whilst there was a centralising of power at national level, at local level we saw 'informal neighbourhood action' with no one formally in charge (p66). Wyler suggests we need both. Will this lead to radical change – 'a shift from service delivery to the building of communities'? (p67). National crisis can often produce lasting change: Can this reconnection with "community" be harnessed to connect 'those who are often ignored…to those in authority' (p71). COVID-19 has shown the 'shocking inequality' (p68). Will the most vulnerable bear the brunt again, as they did after 2008 financial crash?

Community Responses in times of Crisis – Glimpses into the past, present and future (Wyler, Steve Local Trust, Creative Commons, (April 2020) ISBN: 978-1-9162638-1-9) **Case study: Firs & Bromford, Birmingham (pages 50-57).** This report/study is summarised above. Here we summarise the relevant West Midlands specific content.	This is an organisation is located in a "tough area" within 1960's built low-cost council estates between Spaghetti junction and the motorways; associated with drugs, crime and deprivation. Paul Wright (local resident and street connector) works to challenge this. The Bromford Theatre Group – puts on an annual pantomime; street parties, open air Zumba classes; and Christmas lights party. Residents here tend to call themselves "neighbours" rather than volunteers. The organisation follows 'ABCD principles: asset-based community development' (p53). It focuses 'on what people can do, not on what they can't. A preference to talk about removing barriers, rather than supporting people' (p53). 'So, when the coronavirus outbreak arrived, people here were, in some ways at least, better prepared than elsewhere…. They were used to looking out for each other. Several organisations—Neighbours Together (the Big Local partnership), Open Door (a local community development agency), Worth Unlimited (a youth charity), Hodge Hill church, Spurgeons children's centre, as well the CAFLO and St Wildred's community centres—were already working together, and between them had relationships with most people across the two neighbourhoods' (p55). The community hub was closed; a hardship fund was established, food parcels as well as seeds and plants, were distributed; a phone line was set up, with benefits advice on tap, and those who were most vulnerable were quickly identified. Digital inclusion and access to the internet can be a problem for many low income families – posing problems for schooling etc. Public services have been described as "largely absent in this crisis" (p56). (Although it is reported that Birmingham CC have set up a city-wide food distribution service but described in the report as "too big and too slow" to support this local area appropriately). Paul wright believes this is because the 'local street is the primary base for a good community, not a local authority' (p56). (BTW: This was the area reported in the media for a local shop charging £19.99 for a bottle of calpol!)

Muslim Charities Forum (2020), The Neighbours Next Door: The Story of Muslim Organisations Responding to COVID-19, Muslim Charities Forum, London.	Overall, the report highlights that over 194 Muslim charities have been supporting people during the COVID-19 crisis (p4). These vary enormously in character, size, scope and access to wider funding. The report cites West Midlands examples. The report includes a link to those known to the Muslim Charities Forum that have been active in the West Midlands in relation to COVID-19 at: https://www.muslimcharitiesforum.org.uk/covid-19-resources/localaction/#1586535626099-7bb4b16a-4d5c These initiatives include the Muslim Women's Network UK hot food initiative in Birmingham (pp6-7); Muslim Association of Britain Youth Birmingham COVID-19 support which has conducted outreach to international students stranded in Britain in the pandemic (p18); the Penny Appeal, working with the Salvation Army in Birmingham to provide essentials to the homeless. Overall, the report highlights that: "The power of reach within marginalised and vulnerable communities cannot be understated. Certain charities have the trust marker that others cannot breach. It requires decades of work, ploughing through cultural and religious sensitivities." (p29), but also that: "The sector would benefit from greater collaboration, this will undoubtedly allow skill sets to be shared, greater reach and more importantly the exchange of good practice." (p29)