

**ADULT SOCIAL CARE AND SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL
2 MARCH 2022**

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON VCS ORGANISATIONS THAT SUPPORT HEALTH & WELLBEING

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of the paper is to provide a general overview on the impact that Covid-19 has had on VCS organisations and their support to health and wellbeing services.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 In normal circumstances, the voluntary and community sector (VCS) is a vital partner in providing a wide ranging care and support to enable vulnerable people to live fulfilling and independent lives, and to maintain their health and wellbeing so they do not require the support of statutory health and adult social care services. They provide critical support for some of the groups most vulnerable to poor outcomes from covid-19, including: Older People, BAME, Domestic Abuse and Mental Health (including causes of anxiety such as debt management).
- 2.2 Covid-19 has had a dramatic effect on how our local VCS organisations operate. From impacting on income from their normal funding streams, uncertainty about their future, and the way that they deliver their services. In these challenging times, many have seen an increased demand for their services whilst facing reductions in income sources and less availability of staff and volunteers to meet this increased demand.
- 2.3 Covid-19 restrictions (such as social distancing measures) have meant that staff and clients in VCS services have been unable to deliver or access services in person, which is obviously particularly important in the health and wellbeing sector. It has been challenging for VCS organisations when considering how they could operate (if at all) during the pandemic and how they could recover and/or deliver their services differently.

3. DISCUSSION

- 3.1 This report is based on the interactions between Public Health and VCS organisations that support health and wellbeing, during the pandemic. We realised in the early stages of our Covid planning that a community capacity building approach, based on a shared understanding and commitment to tackle this at a community level, would be essential.
- 3.2 Public Health have worked closely with the VCS through various routes during the pandemic to offer support and build relationships. See key areas of work with VCS partners and the importance of their input below :

3.3 **GoodSam Volunteers**

In March 2020 The HelpBoro Hub was quickly established by the Council to help our elderly and vulnerable residents affected by the pandemic. Residents were able to call the helpline to request help with tasks they could not complete themselves, such as food deliveries, emergency food parcels and prescription collections as they shielded or self-isolated. Essential to the success of this programme were the use of GoodSam Volunteers (also known as NHS Volunteer Responders) – local people who signed up to the GoodSam programme to provide the practical support on the ground following referrals from the HelpBoro hub. These were not so much VCS organisations, but individual volunteers who committed to help.

3.4 **Covid Grant funding Streams for VCS Organisations**

Middlesbrough Council was able to utilise Government Covid funding to offer various grant funding streams to VCS organisations, impacted by Covid-19, who normally provide essential health, care and wellbeing support (see list of VCS Organisations funded at Appendix). These grants totalled over £300k and were to ensure the most vulnerable were not negatively impacted further by the pandemic and the 3 main funding streams are clarified below:

3.5 **VCS Comms Grants and VCS Sustainability Grants :**

In October 2020 the Council opened two grant application processes to VCS organisations :

- a) **Communications Grants** : inviting VCS organisations to share our Covid messaging; create their own using our factual support; and become Covid Champions, ensuring that the messages resonate well with their clients using their local knowledge and assets.
- b) **VCS Sustainability grants** : These grants were designed to support VCS organisations whose finances had been affected by the pandemic to a level where it was having a negative impact on the services they offered to vulnerable groups. We wanted to ensure that these services were able to remain financially viable through lockdown and beyond. We also wanted to support continued running of services in a COVID-friendly way where feasible, so that vulnerable residents and communities could continue access them safely throughout the pandemic. Many organisations were facing a loss in income due to the closure of charity shops; the inability to hold fundraisers as normal; and loss of staff/volunteers due to isolation but were keen to continue supporting their service users if possible.

3.6 **Mental Health/Isolation Grants**

The Council received additional government funding in 2021 aimed particularly at people suffering from poor mental health, impacted further by the isolation enforced by Covid-19. As previously we invited grant applications from VCS organisations providing mental health support. Many grants awarded focused on funding additional staff within VCS organisations that were showing or anticipating increased demand for their mental health and wellbeing services as the lockdown eased, such as befriending services for those socially isolated.

3.7 **VCS Recovery Grants**

In mid-2021 we also offered VCS organisations the chance to apply for Recovery grants – to allow them and their clients to ‘recover’ from the impact of the pandemic and return to “normal” services as much as possible. This programme built on the sustainability grants previously awarded and looked to support people affected negatively around key themes such as mental health, financial recovery, social isolation/re-connection, community cohesion/engagement and increasing vaccination uptake. Once again, VCS organisations stepped up, applied for funding and used it to adapt and improve their service offer.

3.8 **Middlesbrough Covid Champions Network**

The VCS organisations that received the above grants were all invited to become part of the council’s Covid Champions Network. Nominated individuals from these VCS organisations have been invaluable in sharing our Covid messaging with their clients and communities through their own routes; encouraging vaccine uptake; dispelling myths and also providing practical support at vaccine pop-up clinics. They have also played a role in giving us feedback on Covid concerns from their service users and communities to allow us to respond appropriately and have been able to keep their clients correctly informed, updated and reassured around Covid guidelines over the last two years. They have been an essential link for public health in an ever-changing environment and have played an valuable role in addressing misinformation and being creative in their approaches.

4. **CONCLUSIONS**

4.1 The financial health of the VCS has been hit by covid-19; changes to service delivery and increased demand have all led to greater strain on the sector. The VCS has faced challenging times due to the pandemic - from dealing with the sudden loss of normal funding sources to the unavailability of staff and the difficulty of trying to deliver their services remotely. Those that public health have worked with appear to have taken these challenges head on, whilst also adopting civic responsibility in helping keep their service users and wider communities safe and encouraging recovery from the pandemic through positive messaging and working differently. The impact of Covid-19 has *challenged* our VCS organisations to work differently and has actually given us some good opportunities for improving our working relationships with those organisations that received grant funding from public health. The situation has shown that when required Council departments; VCS organisations; community figureheads and local people can work together for a common aim to improve the health and wellbeing of our most vulnerable.

4.2 However, it would be worthwhile for the Council to ensure that those services that they rely on to support Health and Wellbeing have fully recovered from the pandemic and are able to continue offering their services, particularly as there may well now be a higher demand for services from vulnerable people negatively affected. Although the funds offered to date have offered short term relief a wider package of support and bolstering of VCS capacity may

well be required in the longer term if we are to fully support our communities to flourish and recover.

5. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 1) Case Study provided to PHE on Covid Champions Funding (2021)



PHE- CC008 Case
Study Middlesbrough

- 2) LGA Report : “Accessing Support – The role of the VCS during Covid-19” (June 2020)
<https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/Accessing%20support%20the%20role%20of%20the%20voluntary%20and%20community%20sector%20during%20COVID-19%20WEB.pdf>

- 3) NCVO/Nottingham Trent University/Sheffield Hallam University : “Respond, Recover, Reset : the voluntary sector and Covid-19” (December 2021)
<http://cpwop.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2021/12/RRR-Report-Dec-2021.pdf>

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APPENDIX

LIST OF VCS ORGANISATIONS Supported by Council Covid-19 Grant Funding

(3 Funding Streams : Sustainability; Mental Health & Isolation; Recovery)

	Name of VCS Organisation
1	Recovery Connections
2	Ubuntu Multi-cultural centre CIC
3	Aapna Services
4	AgeUK Tees
5	Core CIC
6	Richmond Fellowship
7	Streets Ahead
8	Community Voice FM
9	BME Network
10	TOP (The Other Perspective)
11	Linx
12	Breckon Hill Community Enterprise
13	Transitions17 cic
14	Tees Valley Chinese Community Centre
15	Al Mustafa Centre
16	Media Cultured
17	Carers Together
18	CVL
19	House of Mercy
20	My Sister's Place
21	CVT (Larchfield Community)
22	Durability North CIC
23	Synergy Teesside
24	The Hope Foundation
25	Element 1 CiC
26	Depaul UK
27	Groundwork North East
28	Teesside Hospice
29	Barefoot Kitchen
30	The Bungalow Partnership
31	Curious Boro