A REPORT SUMMARY OF:

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE VCSE

A survey of VCSE organisations in Brighton, Hove, Adur and Worthing between June and July 2020

This report attempts to illustrate some of the multi-faceted responses to Covid-19 by the VCSE across Adur and Worthing and Brighton and Hove. We found through our research that this response, underpinned by innovation and agility and a closeness to its communities has helped save lives, reduced loneliness and isolation, and alongside the provision of statutory services, prevented the 'system' from becoming overwhelmed with ever increasing need. This was made possible by the VCSE's:

- Trusted relationships with and closeness to service users.
- Reach into diverse communities.
- Value-driven approach.
- Committed, passionate and motivated workforce (both paid and voluntary).
- Strong governance, management and leadership structures.
- Sound financial management.
- Strength of existing relationships, and willingness to work in partnership, with statutory partners, funders and other VCSE organisations.
- Relevant, needs-led service provision.

We identified 3 key priorities that can support the VCSE to remain strong and sustainable at a local level and to address wide reaching inequalities:

Create supporting funding structures by:

- Designing funding structures that acknowledge the assets and strengths held by smaller, grassroots organisations, co-designing and developing solutions.
- Prioritising investment in preventative/early intervention supported by continued flexibilities in accessing funding.
- Establishing a parity of status in funding relationships to engage as one system: engaging the voice of those most in need in early design of solutions.
- Developing services dynamically through learning, enabled by responsive measurement and flexible funding.[1]
- Continuing flexibilities within funding agreements and relationships in response to reduced outputs or underspend as a result of the pandemic.

Expand collaborative working by:

- Creating equitable, trusting relationships underpinned by transparent, open and clear lines of communication.
- Involving VCSE organisations from the start of the planning process, "to work in a collegiate way, to try new approaches, listen to people."
- Embeding principles to enhance future collaboration: flex in delivery, funding, where and how development happens, in who leads and how they lead, enabling experimentation and innovation.
- Involving representation and participation of the range of communities and organisations in the development of strategy as well as operational models.
- Raising awareness, recognition and respect for each other's strengths and contribution and how the VCSE can bring community voice in different ways.

Address social and structural inequalities by:

- Establishing a shared purpose between all stakeholders to address social and structural inequalities, aligning priorities through collaboration and flexible funding structures in the face of diminishing resources.
- Building on the lessons that are being learnt about the significant consequences of entrenched inequality.
- Using learning to lead stakeholders as one system to examine those areas where people are disadvantaged and excluded or impacted negatively by the ways in which services and policies are developed and offered.
- Including the voices of various interest groups and communities, those most impacted by their lived experiences, in the early design and delivery processes.

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1 https://www.ivar.org.uk/research-report/trust-power-and-collaboration/

It is clear that the sector will need ongoing support from funders, commissioners, government and infrastructure organisations to ensure it can navigate, and remain strong, in this new operating context. This may involve support to:

- Continue service delivery and development and support increased and new demand.
- Share best practice with regards to service delivery and redesign; managing and delivering online and/or blended services.
- Investment for volunteering programmes.
- Build on the relationships and partnerships that have been essential during this time.
- Remain financially sustainable.
- Demonstrate and articulate the positive impact and value of services.
- Invest in the skills and expertise of its workforce (both paid and voluntary) to enable it to continue to provide high quality, and much needed, support to a diverse range of individuals and communities.

A call to action

We call on our partners within the VCSE, our statutory services and private sector to work with us and each other to develop actions that urgently tackle the priorities identified within this report by:

- Respecting, celebrating and valuing the contribution of each sector, developing a *"shared sense of purpose to encourage a person-centred approach based on need and better understanding between all parties"*.
- Creating open, honest and transparent dialogue across sectors.
- Committing to social justice and equality.
- Acknowledging the vital role the VCSE sector has played and of the principle that investing in a healthy, vibrant and connected sector is essential.
- To support VCSE with continued relationship development between/across sectors to encourage more 'experimentation' in co designing solutions, pooling resources, co-designing funding/commissioning processes.

Community Works will commit to the following actions in response to the priorities identified by the sector. We will:

- Examine and adjust how Community Works operates to ensure our internal and external work programmes prioritise diversity, equality and inclusion.
- Review our training and support provision to encompass the areas needed to meet the challenges identified in the report.
- Examine our offer around volunteering as it evolves and the provision of support for VCSE and partners in this area.
- Continue infrastructure work; supporting and promoting collaboration and partnership working, exploring new ways of working, enhance shared intelligence in the very early stages of planning and co-designing innovative solutions across sectors (all sectors together) and places.
- Remain strategically involved locally, regionally and nationally to bring and share learning into the sector and across sectors to inform local success.
- Work with partners to explore opportunities for creativity in funding models, sustainability and mixed funding economy to support local populations.