
Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee

15th October 2020

Report from Dudley CVS

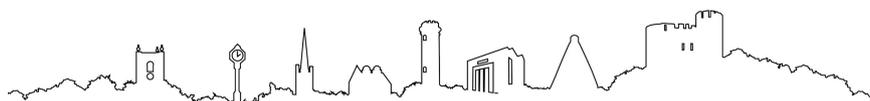
Community response to the Covid-19 pandemic

Purpose

1. *The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate how Dudley CVS and the wider voluntary, community and social enterprise sector (VCSE – including faith based organisations)*
 - Supported a system wide approach to ensuring vulnerable people received essential food and medication supplies
 - Enabled newly emerging community initiatives to thrive whilst enabling them to engage with our developing support structures
 - Created a resilient chain of information

Recommendations

2. It is recommended that members of the scrutiny committee:
 - Recognise the immense contribution of the VCSE during the initial outbreak
 - Give consideration to the future sustainability of the VCSE post pandemic
 - Note the report and the assurance it provided



Background



3. The VCSE, working in concert with other agencies formed an integral part of the Covid response. Mobilisation was undertaken at speed, minimising risks and protecting citizens both from the effects of the virus, and from the more negative effects of social measures being implemented to limit the spread of the virus.

- 3.1 Dudley CVS was asked by Dudley Council and Public Health to coordinate this response. Our methodology with local organisations was to support, engage and facilitate work with already established, capable and rooted local organisations. They knew their communities, they were already part of collaborative relationships and could mobilise quickly.

- 3.2 However, it was clear that many 'new' groups were springing up on a grassroots basis through the initiative of local volunteers and community groups. Our approach in relation to these was not to take over or stifle through over-organisation or bureaucracy – which would have been counterproductive and would risk dissipating goodwill efforts – but instead was to ensure that they were invited to be part of our coordinated response, and were supported in engaging with emerging structures which would enhance and align efforts in ways that were most productive for our local communities.

Activity

Following liaison with our sector and Executive committee our response was planned as follows:

- 4.
- **A - support voluntary, community and social enterprise sector organisations (VCSE) continuity and sustainability**
 - **B – facilitate virtual networks for dealing with vulnerability in communities**
 - **C: - co-ordinate emergency response volunteering**

A - support voluntary, community and social enterprise sector organisations (VCSE) continuity and sustainability

- 4.1 Dudley CVS carried out a survey to establish how VCSE were coping with the pandemic, what their issues and challenges were. These fell in to three main categories: funding support, support with volunteers and HR support.

- 4.2 Our officers continued to provide regular information updates in relation to funding streams, contract positions, HR etc. A bespoke website section was created to support these challenges <http://dudleycvsreview.org/covid-19-community-action-and-support/>

Some staff continued to remotely support VCS organisations requiring information and guidance on governance, funding, communications etc.

4.3 Regular online briefings and 'catch ups' with VCS organisation leaders were held.

These virtual networks helped bring together colleagues who were often been dealing with the challenges in isolation. CVS staff also delivered online briefings on funding, operating safe venues etc. Common threads from the forum conversations were:

4.4

- Loss of income streams (room hire, investments, fundraising, sales etc.)

- Future sustainability

4.5

- Developing new ways of remotely working with vulnerable clients, particular emphasis on digital exclusion issues.

- Confusion regarding the rules on social distancing / group meetings etc.

- Social isolation, loneliness and poverty

We commenced discussions with strategic partners regarding the recovery stage of the pandemic. There will be many challenges for VCSO's going forward in terms of sustainability and providing support to the most vulnerable people living in our communities whilst Covid restriction measures are in place. It will be imperative that conversations are held regarding future support and investment for local VCSE if we are to avoid seeing many cease to exist.

B – facilitate virtual networks for dealing with vulnerability in communities

We recognised that many vulnerable individuals in the community would quickly become further isolated and challenged as things developed. We created 6 virtual multi-disciplinary teams (mirroring the locality geography utilised by NHS / GP's.), led by our Integrated Plus team (I.P.), to consider how this vulnerability could be best managed and individuals supported through the pandemic. The 6 were established and mobilised within a week and covered:

4.6

- Sedgley, Coseley and Gornal
- Dudley and Netherton
- Kingswinford and Amblecote
- Brierley Hill
- Stourbridge, Wollescote and Lye
- Halesowen and Quarry Bank

5.

The networks:

5.1

- Provided a single point of access for the co-ordination and mobilisation of essential community social support for vulnerable people and their families regardless of age.



- Across partners, identified vulnerable people and families in need of social support.

The IP staff led each of the six Covid-19 Community Support Networks. They chaired virtual meetings on a weekly basis and found them to be hugely successful. When discussing referrals in the meetings, staff commented on how exceptionally helpful all partners were in arranging immediate support for those in most need. Strong, positive working relationships developed within the networks and staff expressed a desire to maintain these for better collaborative working in the future. The virtual networks continue to meet monthly post the initial outbreak period.

C: - co-ordinate emergency response volunteering

There was a groundswell of local people wanting to play a role in supporting COVID-19 efforts through volunteering. Dudley CVS moved quickly to harness this support in a safe and effective manner ensuring efforts were well co-ordinated and duplication minimised. A recruitment process began and a bespoke website page launched. We established and communicated guidelines on 'safe volunteering practice' to underpin the work.

We recruited over 600 community volunteers to support all efforts in relation to Covid.

5.2 *(The national RVS volunteer programme did not engage with VCSE local efforts, a picture that was replicated across many other areas of the country).*

We made an approach to local churches (Love Dudley) and other VCSE who deliver befriending services to deliver a co-ordinated offer, covering the 6 localities, going forward. This was achieved within a week with full coverage. The VCSE stepped up quickly to support efforts, offering many varied support services for vulnerable people.

6. We offered support to the emerging grassroots, resident led Covid groups, to ensure they were operating safely, aligned to other efforts and structures and were maximising efforts. We supported the development of hubs in all six localities, some of these were self-sufficient, others required support.

6.1
6.2 What quickly emerged as the priority for involving volunteers was the shopping and delivery of food and medication for those shielding and vulnerable. We assigned CVS staff to manage volunteers and tasks by locality and matched them with the IP locality leads. We set up a bespoke phone line for the general public requiring support and staffed it with CVS admin. We established protocols for payment and expenses and safe volunteering practice. We worked closely with BC Food Bank to devise protocols for managing clients requiring poverty food parcels (Phase 1).

In addition to the above, the CVS children's team worked with partners to develop and implement the borough wide response to providing 6000 children a week with a free school meal (FSM) and then a national voucher scheme.

The numbers continued to grow at speed and we realised that the system would a) become unsustainable and b) increasing numbers of volunteers were being asked to

make journeys at a time when lock down measures were being tightened. So we began to discuss and develop with partners at Dudley MBC and BC Food Bank a longer term, sustainable and robust system.

- 6.3 Phase 2 went live in early May and consisted of a bespoke food warehouse at Saltwells stocked with bulk supplies purchased by the Council. Dudley MBC staff were deployed to manage food logistics and distribution. A new phone line and call handling system was devised with CA Dudley and staffed by library colleagues. This went live on 20th May.

The following numbers of people were served (data to end of July):

- 6.4
- 783 agency referrals
 - 335 via our CVS main phone line (calls from general public/self-referrals)
 - 981 via BC Food Bank
- 6.5 In addition to the above, 4,500 people in the shielded group have received free food parcels via Dudley MBC/National Government.

- 6.6 The number of volunteers that registered with CVS was positively overwhelming, to date 618. Those volunteers with a DBS check were able to support us with shopping for people and delivering medication. Many of these developed relationships with clients and continued shopping for them on a routine basis as required. We deployed some volunteers to help other organisation's, for example Black Country Foodbank and Beacon with telephone befriending. A small number of volunteers were able to support the CCG by delivering antibiotics prescribed by the RED Centre at Dudley Guest.

- 6.7 We also made plans for volunteers to support with the delivery of testing swabs to care homes within the borough. For those volunteers who do not have a DBS, we were able to look at creative ways to get them involved and still make a difference. 40 of these volunteers have been sewing items of PPE for healthcare workers and we added a link to our website that all our volunteers have access to, containing a selection of other self-directed volunteering roles. <http://dudleycvsreview.org/how-you-can-help/>

- 6.8 **Future plans for Covid volunteers:** We are keen to harness the community spirit that has emerged and consider how we sustain the interest beyond the pandemic. We are currently working with Public Health to ascertain ways of re-engaging our Covid volunteers in preparation for a possible second wave of Covid-19. We are also working with Public Health to help explore opportunities for engaging local people in the roles of Covid Champions who will help communicate key safety measures to the general public to minimize the spread of the virus.
- 6.9

Challenges / Future

- 6.10 The biggest challenge presently is trying to envisage the future shape of the VCSE and prepare accordingly. The challenges are diverse and organisations are still dealing

with the here and now and the implications of a second wave. There will need to be a recovery stage for all. This will shape our role going forward. Government announcements will also shape the direction of travel.

6.11

In relation to the potential second wave of the pandemic, the systems and volunteers are ready to mobilise at short notice. Numerous conversations have taken place with colleagues to review and improve upon the initial response.

For further information and stories on Covid and the VCSE visit:

6.12

www.dudleycvsblog.com

www.dudleycvreview.org

Andy Gray

6.13

Chief Executive, Dudley CVS

7.

7.1

8.

Appendix
A



Appendix A

We would like to conclude this report with some positive feedback and stories from both our staff, clients and volunteers.

“Rose and Dennis – Rose was allocated to support Dennis with some shopping in March and after ringing him to get his list, was very upset to hear he lived off ready meals. She then made him a batch of home-made treats such as shepherd’s pie, cheese and potato pie, stew etc. for his freezer. She did his other bits of shopping and rang him a couple of times a week for a chat. Two weeks ago he received a call from the QE Hospital to tell her that Dennis had fallen down the stairs at his maisonette and was in hospital, but she was the only person he had to ring. Rose could not believe this as she had only been looking after him for 5 weeks and was incredulous he had no-one else. They let her chat to him and she sent him a treats basket to the hospital. Once he comes out she will continue to look after him and will start visiting him as soon as restrictions are lifted”.

“The resilience, courage and kindness demonstrated by my colleagues at CVS and partners we have worked with (Public Health, Local Authority, voluntary sector organisations). This has been a huge source of support for me, feeling that there is a genuine compassion for others within CVS. Our partners stepping up to do things outside of their normal roles has also been inspiring. I have developed positive relationships with others at CVS who I normally didn’t speak to as much as I would have liked, and have developed genuine friendships with some of our partners as well as a result of this”

“How well we have worked together as a team and supported each other, and personally, I’ve relished working with people I may not regularly work with”.

“I’m proud that the Charity I work for have been asked to take the lead on the community response to the pandemic, I think that speaks volumes about our organisation and the people within it”.

“I am also immensely proud to work for CVS. I was invested in CVS before this, but am even more so now”.

“I’m really proud of DCVS as an organisation and how we were able to respond so quickly to the pandemic by creating a model that has proved to be a success. I’m proud of our staff for working so hard throughout the last 7 weeks and for always supporting one another. I really couldn’t imagine wanting to work for a another organization”.

“I feel fortunate for the support and flexibility CVS have provided us during this time and it is nice that our hard work and efforts have repeatedly been acknowledged by management. In these very uncertain times I’m also very thankful to be in a job and in one that I know makes a difference to other people’s lives”.

“It has been personally really rewarding to be helping others and is a monumental achievement for Dudley CVS to get a solid community response up and running so quickly. We’re all really proud of this and in spite of the many challenges CVS staff and volunteers have given their all to make it work”.

“We decided to have regular informal and formal team Webex and Zoom meetings and catch ups for anyone who wanted to join, wider than the Healthwatch team right from the start and they have really helped to connect us, to help us to share, learn together, plan, and also to take some of the anxiety away and keep each other’s spirits up”.

“The person who added to their shopping list a bunch of flowers for the volunteer has really touched all of us”.

“The overwhelming support of colleagues at a really difficult time has been inspiring, at times overwhelming and made us all feel incredibly lucky to be part of the Dudley CVS family”.

“On an organisational level we should be really proud of how we have all responded so effectively and so quickly with getting a bespoke approach off the ground from scratch”.

“I was part of an extraordinary team who stepped up, got the job done and took the time to be a friend to some of our most vulnerable people”.

“I realised how much the word team actually means and that even though you are sitting at home at your dining room table that you are never alone”.