COVID-19 VCS Recovery & Resilience

Developing a draft plan for the voluntary and community sector going forward

COVID-19 has impacted on people and communities in a myriad of ways; financial hardship and the inability to provide for oneself or his or her family; enforced isolation and therefore being separated from friends and loved ones leading to feelings on loneliness; increased racism directed towards them; a deterioration of general mental and emotional wellbeing; and increased risk of domestic abuse. This is not an exhaustive list, and it will not be possible to understand the full impact of COVID-19 for some time, given that a vaccine has yet to be developed, and life is not expected to return to 'normal' for some time.

However, swift mobilisation of community assets, within the public, private and VCS sectors has enabled Hackney to adapt quickly to the new environment we find ourselves in. Some of these new systems and pathways will enable continued support to reach those most in need. But as life slowly resumes *for some*, we now need to shift our focus to the short and long-term future to understand and plan for what the community needs to not just survive the crisis, but to recover from it. This document therefore considers seven identified themes, based on our knowledge, and observations gained through our work in co-ordinating and supporting the VCS COVID-19 crisis response during the past 10 weeks.

As such Hackney CVS is keen to work with local VCS organisations, VCS representatives across our networks and the VCSETLG[1], other infrastructure bodies, the Council and public bodies to start to think what a recovery and resilience plan could look like which has the voluntary and community sector at its heart. This briefing is intended to provide an initial starting point for further discussion. This initial outline has been informed by a range of discussions we have hosted with local VCS organisations through our networks, our discussions with the Council and CCG and feedback from the neighbourhood conversations.

It's important to acknowledge we are needing to plan within a fluid environment, and therefore an agile approach will need to be adopted when applying the COVID-19 VCS Recovery and Resilience plan to our work. In allowing that flexibility, we will be best able to respond to new and emergent needs as the situation evolves, particularly for example, if COVID-19 cases begin to rise and we see a second peak. We will also need to think in the context of a pre and post COVID-19 vaccine community, to ensure any plan developed is robust enough to guide us through the next phase, and any new challenges the community is likely to encounter.

Underpinning such a **COVID VCS Recovery & Resilience Plan** should be five guiding principles:

1. **Collaborative and Partnership working** – To ensure we are able to coproduce truly person-centred solutions, it will be crucial that we adopt a collaborative approach to our work, and use existing partnerships, as well as developing new ones to meet the holistic needs of the community; prioritising the local and grassroots, and being willing to adapt our style of working to enable inclusion from our diverse communities.

2. **Communication & Information sharing** – Key to our success of navigating the crisis has been our ability to ensure effective communication between the VCS and public sector, identifying linkages

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[1] The VCSETLG is the Voluntary and Community Sector Transformation Leadership group which is made of VCS representatives who sit within the Health & Care system infrastructure and/or chairs of the various VCS networks that exist

between what's happening on the ground and the wider system; providing clear, accurate, timely and targeted information, underpinning our approach to collaborative working.

3. **Sustainable Funding** – The VCS was already working within a challenging environment; reduced funding with increased demand. The crisis has highlighted the valuable role the VSC plays in responding to acute local needs, however it has also exacerbated the already strained environment within which the VCS operates. Recovering from COVID-19 requires a long-term approach, and this needs to be sustainably funded, to protect the VCS, and ensure the community can indeed recover.

4. **Tackling inequalities** – At the core of our approach should be a collective commitment to addressing inequalities and creating the space and opportunities for our diverse communities to be at the forefront of change and to hold more power than they currently do. This means ensuring that local neighbourhood priorities, for instance, are driven by local grassroots communities as much as health & care professionals and that the system as a whole understands what challenges it faces in becoming better at addressing structural racism and disadvantage. Key to this will be an examination of what needs to happen to build social capital, community cohesion and an inclusive approach across the board. The VCS and the Public Sector still have a long way to go in terms of becoming more culturally competent so support will be needed from the system to enable this.

5. **Building on success and innovation arising from the crisis** – the crisis has, in some cases, allowed long standing problems and system blockages to be addressed e.g. VCS having access to Discharge Assessment information to aid the freeing up of hospital beds for COVID patients or the deployment of Mutual Aid volunteers into local VCS organisations. We want to ensure the good practice and learning from the first phase of the crisis is not lost and contributes to this strategy

Next Steps

1. **Conduct a survey** to:
    a. test if the seven themes, and the correlating objectives accurately reflect the current situation and the future needs of Hackneys diverse communities and the VCS orgs and groups that support them
    b. identify key stakeholders who can help develop the solutions, and play a key role in delivering against the COVID-19 VCS Recovery and Resilience Plan – focussing on engagement with the local VCS and public bodies

2. **Revise COVID-19 VCS Recovery and Resilience Plan** based on survey findings

3. **Work with existing VCS networks to identify hosts for working groups** and routes for inputting to working groups, and feeding back any actions and outcomes

4. **Hold meetings with the public sector to align priorities and plans**; with a view to establishing working groups for each of the agreed themes (for Theme 1, individual working groups to be established for each objective), to develop the necessary solutions and desired outcomes, with the working groups then responsible to executing delivery and maintaining oversight.

	Theme	Objective
1	**Inequalities** **_OVERARCHING AIM_**: To reduce and protect against inequalities which have arisen, or that have worsened due to the impact of COVID-19	**OBJECTIVE 1.1**: To support people from **ethnically diverse and religious / faith based** backgrounds to recover and build resilience.
		OBJECTIVE 1.2: To support people from **migrant and refugee communities,** including **undocumented migrants,** to recover and build resilience.
		OBJECTIVE 1.3: To support **working age people**, recover and build resilience from _financial hardship._
		OBJECTIVE 1.4: To support **older people** (>50) recover and build resilience.
		OBJECTIVE 1.5: To support **children, young people, and maternity** (<25) recover and build resilience.
		OBECTIVE 1.6: To support **disabled people** recover and build resilience.
		OBECTIVE 1.7: To support people with a **learning disability** recover and build
		OBJECTIVE 1.8: To support people from the **LGBTQ+ community** recover and build resilience
		OBJECTIVE 1.9: To support wider system thinking about **structural racism, inequality and community empowerment**
2	**Fear and Anxiety**	**OBJECTIVE 2.1:** To tackle and alleviate fears and anxieties amongst residents which have arisen due to COVID-19; supporting re-engagement with the wider community.
3	**Safeguarding**	**OBJECTIVE 3.1:** To ensure that the correct safeguarding measures are in place to protect the most vulnerable within the community.
4	**Digital Divide**	**OBJECTIVE 4.1:** To work collaboratively across the system to find sustainable and long-term solutions to bridge the digital divide.
5	**Protecting and supporting VCS orgs at risk**	**OBJECTIVE 5.1:** To understand the impact of COVID on the sustainability of local VCS organisations
		OBJECTIVE 5.2: To explore sustainable funding options which enables effective delivery of the COVID-19 VCS Recovery and Resilience
		OBJECTIVE 5.3: To lobby for and identify funding streams and support for VCS organisations and groups to cover any associated costs
		OBJECTIVE 5.4: To understand the infrastructure needs of the VCS going forward, particularly in relation to the provision of PPE, creating safe spaces for service users, staff development and support and IT infrastructure/digital maturity needed for the VCS to deliver more efficiently

		OBJECTIVE 5.5: *To better understand the socio economic impact that the sector makes, particularly in regard to how the sector can enable system savings to be made by addressing issues earlier on*
6	**Mental and Emotional Wellbeing**	**OBJECTIVE 6.1:** *To improve the mental and emotional wellbeing of Hackney residents adversely affected by COVID-19 e.g. through bereavement, isolation, delayed medical treatment etc.*
7	**Mobilising volunteers**	**OBJECTIVE 7.1:** *Volunteer Centre Hackney will lead on this theme to ensure the huge volunteering effort seen in Hackney is sustained and supported, to provide support to community groups and residents of all backgrounds to share their skills to tackle the issues and effects of COVID-19.*

What will we do with the information we collect and how will the strategy influence other local developments?

The information we will collect will be feed into the strategy so that evolves over time. We will use our relationships with the public sector to create a joined up action plan which responses to the priorities in the strategy.

The strategy also has the opportunity to influence a range of current initiatives which can be summarised as follows:

1. The Council's impact assessment work and approach to tackling inequalities
2. The Council's VCS Strategy and broader CCG approach to engaging and investing in the VCS
3. The proposed new VCS Enabler Group and operating model which will provide dedicated space within the Health & Care System for VCS issues to be addressed and actioned
4. The development of neighbourhood priorities and inequality plans