



Skills Economy and Growth Commission
9th March 2022
The impact of Covid19 on VCS

Introduction

- The Council's perspective - Sonia Khan, Head of Policy and Strategic Delivery
- Impact of Covid19 on Hackney's VCS -
 - HCVS
 - Woodberry Aid
 - Volunteer Centre Hackney

Hackney Council

- The VCS was critical to the emergency response during the pandemic and through close collaboration and partnership working provided both insight and reassurance to the Council on the needs of vulnerable residents and how these were being met
- Through initiatives such as the London Community Response Fund, philanthropic funders and some LAs including Hackney Council collaborated to ensure that funding was prioritising the emergency response
- This enabled those organisations (many small grassroots) working with the most vulnerable to respond to the needs of residents and keep them safe
- Philanthropic funders were not collaborating with VCS in the same way and therefore have not necessarily understood that we are still in crisis in terms of poverty, inequality and complex needs and this is no longer prioritised



Impact of COVID-19 on the VCS

March 2022

Our vision is of

A FAIRER HACKNEY

Our mission is to

TACKLE INEQUALITY AND DRIVE SOCIAL CHANGE

How has COVID impacted the voluntary sector?

- Increased demand for services from service users with more complex needs
- A need to diversify its service offer to meet emerging needs, beyond core service offer
- Improved relationships between other VCS and statutory partners
- A need to remodel service delivery to deliver using a hybrid approach
- Allowed the sector to be more visible, with the reach and expertise more fully understood, particularly in reaching residents furthest away from mainstream services
- Financial position: 21% improved, 24% deteriorated, and 55% unchanged; concerns however remain for future financial sustainability with lack of funding still #1 concern

How has COVID affected the sector's ability to meet the needs of the borough?

- Improved partnership working, with wider recognition of the value of the VCS
- Issues which were previously hidden became visible during the peak of the pandemic; emergency funding permitted the VCS to mobilise and respond
- Increased demand however has provided additional challenges for the VCS to meet the needs of service users.

What does demand in these services look like?

- Widening of health inequalities is driving demand for services, including around advice, and services supporting with poverty (food/fuel)
- Marked increase in service users in need of MH support; lack of appropriate services to signpost/refer onto, limiting their ability to meet demand, and manage capacity
- Increased demand, with more complex cases, and lack of referral partners is contributing to a fatigued workforce.

What does the landscape of the VCS like in the future?

- There are opportunities for the VCS to be play a significant role in supporting the recovery/build back better agenda; however fair and equitable resources are required
- Whilst we haven't experienced a mass loss of VCS orgs, many have come very close to closure, and their future remains uncertain. We need to commitment to invest in the sector, to ensure the borough continues to be served by a vibrant and effective VCS which support a thriving community

View from Woodberry Aid
Mutual Aid Group

Euphemia Chukwu

Hackney Council - responding to the challenges

- We are aware of the [challenges](#) facing our residents and that the situation is more difficult than it was pre-pandemic
- We are working with other funders to share our understanding of these and that we are still facing a crisis of poverty and inequalities
- The collaboration and partnership working developed through the pandemic changed our relationships with the VCS, an aspiration that had been identified in the VCS Strategy 2019-22
- We have introduced a [new funding stream](#) within the Council's grant programme that aims to enable and facilitate the embedding and give the sector the capacity and flexibility to respond to the challenges facing residents
- We are working to continue to [embed this approach](#) across the Council with a particular focus on our frontline services

Hackney Council - responding to the challenges

Community partnerships priorities in Council:

Embedded into priorities for volunteering, voluntary sector partnership working and grant making

Enable community partnership network to continue in the form and at the pace needed by the sector (also included in poverty reduction framework)

Preparedness for future emergencies:

Approach can be utilised to mobilise support and respond to refugee crisis and to design wave 4 response - further work to do turn into a guide within emergency responses

Wider prevention and early intervention:

Taken forward through poverty reduction framework

Poverty Reduction Framework

1. Prevention, early years and early help

Aim: to focus on prevention, early years and early help for all ages, as a key way to improve life chances and tackle poverty.

2. Tackling low wages and cost of living

Aim: to take actions to address low wages and the cost of living, as key drivers of poverty in London.

3. Responding to the material needs of poverty

Aim: to better meet people's immediate material needs and offer more preventative help.

4. Prioritising poverty reduction across the system

Aim: to ensure poverty reduction is a priority across the system

5. Ways of working

Aim: to help people on low incomes address all the issues which matter, not just the presenting issue.

Ways of working

Crosscutting corporate priorities

- Outward facing and collaborative, looking across the whole system to find the right sustainable solutions and on integration- rather than starting from a service, individual or institutional perspective
- Use our role as anchor organisations for community benefit (with procurement, assets and employment opportunities for local people)
- Deliver inclusive co-designed public services and enabling shared learning across the system to accelerate this work

Training, support, peer support

- A recognition that we need to work more relationally, whether at a community or individual level, seeing the way things are through the lived experience of communities and individuals rather than services, plans and numbers

Inclusive leadership and diversity

- Continue on our important journey to being an open, inclusive and culturally humble organisation that proactively tackles racism
- Reflecting the diversity and lived experience of residents in Hackney

Leadership

- Flex and adapt as the situation evolves and build in preparedness for similar future events, working with complexity and uncertainty