

Report of the Chief Officer Communities

Report to Scrutiny Board (Environment, Housing and Communities)

Date: November 2020

Subject: Responding to the COVID 19 Pandemic – The Volunteer Response

Are specific electoral wards affected?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If yes, name(s) of ward(s):	
Has consultation been carried out?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Will the decision be open for call-in?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If relevant, access to information procedure rule number:	
Appendix number:	

Summary

1. Main issues

- In July 2020, scrutiny heard received a report and heard evidence on the voluntary sector response to the COVID 19 pandemic.
- The evidence session was attended by the managers of the ward level Community Care hubs set up to respond to the pandemic
- Based on that evidence a statement was produced by the board setting out its views on the evidence presented and with a series of proposed actions to be developed by officers
- This report updates on activity in this area between July and November 2020 to inform the board of progress.

2. Best Council Plan Implications (click [here](#) for the latest version of the Best Council Plan)

- The work referenced in this report has contributed to the Council's overall aim of tackling poverty and reducing inequalities. In particular it has focused on Safe, Strong Communities including -
 - Keeping people safe from harm and protecting the most vulnerable.
 - Helping people out of financial hardship.
 - Being responsive to local needs, building thriving, resilient communities.
 - Promoting community respect and resilience.

3. Resource Implications

- Funding has been provided by Adults and Health Directorate direct to hubs for the period 1st April to 30th September 2020. Further funding has been drawn by the Council from Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, and an element of this has funded this work until 31 December 2020.
- Community Committee wellbeing funds where appropriate to COVID-19 local activities. Where appropriate and supportive of voluntary hubs, existing funding has been re-purposed for COVID-19 work. A review has taken place with voluntary hubs on their experience over the past three months to inform immediate and longer-term resource requirements for a more sustainable programme.
- Council staff have been extensively re-deployed from other council services to administer the extensive back office arrangements and as link officers with hubs. The Communities Team have been re-focused to COVID-19 support to communities and hubs for the past three months.
- Voluntary Action Leeds have contributed significant staff time and other resources in supporting the overall arrangements and the voluntary hubs directly including, organising the review meetings and producing publications that enhance the volunteering effort overall. Work continues to support the Hubs to develop a more sustainable volunteer base and volunteer management arrangements.

Recommendations

- a) Note and comment on the contents of this report.
- b) Comment on ongoing local experience of the work of the Community Care Voluntary Hubs in local neighbourhoods

1. Purpose of this report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update on the work, which Leeds City Council (LCC), Voluntary Action Leeds (VAL) and other organisations have continued to undertake in response to ongoing needs in our communities as the Covid-19 Pandemic has continued.

2. Background information

- 2.1 Since attendance at the July scrutiny board, the health emergency caused by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has continued to impact on citizens in Leeds. National government released the country from the original period of Lockdown, replacing this with a series of restrictions, which responded to the impacts in different sectors of society. Businesses were reopened in a COVID secure way, and Council services began to return to more normal working. The impacts however remained, and were particularly felt in low-income neighbourhoods.
- 2.2 In September 2020, infection levels began to rise again nationally, and the PM issued a statement imposing new restrictions to tackle infections, and indicating that those restrictions were likely to remain in place for 6 months.

Increasing infection rates were particularly noted in urban areas in the North of England leading to greater restrictions being applied in these places. While these

did not initially apply to Leeds, they were applied from 25th September 2020. At the time of writing Leeds is in Tier 2 (Local COVID alert level: high)

- 2.3 In July 2020, scrutiny received a report and heard evidence on the voluntary sector response to the COVID 19 pandemic. The evidence session was attended by the managers of the ward level Community Care hubs set up to respond to the pandemic. Based on that evidence a statement was produced by the board setting out its views on the evidence presented and with a series of proposed actions to be developed by officers
- 2.4 This report updates on activity in this area between July and November 2020 to inform the board of progress.

3. Main issues

Continued work of Community care hubs

- 3.1 Across the summer period, there were falls in demand for support from the public directly to the Council helplines. Those residents requiring ongoing support with :
 - Food parcels
 - Shopping
 - Prescriptions
 - Welfare callsHowever, there were not such steep falls in the caseloads of the hubs, with large numbers of people and families turning to the voluntary sector for on-going support, including to access food.

By September, we estimate that LCC calls provided only 15% of the work of the hubs, with 85% of those seeking assistance contacting hubs directly. High volumes were associated with areas of highest poverty, and vulnerable older people.
- 3.2 As was described to the board in July, the Pandemic revealed a high number of complex cases where the hubs acted as a gateway to wider welfare support, access to Social care support, mental health support and overcoming the barriers to accessing services
- 3.3 The falling volumes for the Council's paid food option meant that following consultation, this service was ended at the end of September. Residents who had accessed this service on a regular basis were assisted to return to the supermarkets or access on-line shopping. This service made a valuable contribution in providing a method for volunteers to buy residents shopping without risks to either party. Volunteer assisted shopping is still provided by the hubs, but without the LCC system.
- 3.4 In September as Council services resumed, the food warehouse, which had opened in March, was closed, and the Council supported Fareshare to enable them to relocate to more suitable premises, where food can be stored and packed for distribution. This facility now supports the voluntary hubs to ensure they have stocks of food. From mid-September, direct deliveries by the Council were stopped and the Voluntary hubs took on all deliveries. Partnership working continues between Fareshare and the council to ensure that the supply of food remains sufficient for local needs.

Response to Scrutiny Board observations

- 3.5 In July, scrutiny made a number of recommendations relating to the arrangements put in place and their sustainability.
- 3.6 Scrutiny noted the pressure, which the pandemic places on the managers of Community care hubs, as a response VAL and the Council developed guidelines allowing hubs to close for a respite period. Over the summer that happened successfully for a number of hubs. The guidance is has been made available for all hubs.
- 3.7 Scrutiny noted the need to assist with the management of large-scale volunteer engagement. This is an area of ongoing work, where the Volunteer Management network convened by VAL from a wide range of third sector organisations is seeking to share good practice and make improvements. Hubs continue to take part in specially convened Network sessions, which enable them to focus on the particular challenges they face and provide peer support to one another.
- 3.8 In the summer an opportunity arose to apply to the National Lottery Community fund's COVID-19 for further support for the hubs. VAL worked in partnership with 14 of the hub organisations to secure £75,000 to run a six-month project entitled 'From crisis to community cohesion'. The project, which runs from October 2020 to March 2021, will deliver a package of training to support volunteers and volunteer managers, and look at sharing best practice. As part of the project, a number of Hubs will received funding to lead seven different pilots to test and learn different approaches in the following areas:
- Involving refugee and asylum seekers in your volunteer program
 - Steps to independence – up-skilling volunteers to support the community
 - Supporting older volunteers to become active volunteers
 - Delivering sustainable food and distribution models
 - Valuing volunteer recognition and rewarding volunteers
 - Using social media to engage with volunteers
 - Making volunteering accessible to all
- 3.9 VAL have also recently secured just under £25,000 from the Leeds Community Foundation Strategic Infrastructure Support Fund for a six month project working with two of the hubs (New Wortley Community Centre and Slung Low) to build on and strengthen local approaches taken to working with individuals and communities during COVID. VAL will coordinate this work and ensure that we apply the learning from these approaches to our ongoing role as an infrastructure organisation. Partners will focus their work on:
- Proactive outreach work to engage with a diverse range of people and communities, including the most vulnerable
 - Ongoing work to support individuals to develop new relationships within the community to help them stay well and feel connected (outside of traditional services)
 - Support to existing volunteers in the area and the development of new volunteers and opportunities.
- 3.10 Scrutiny noted local volunteers should be retained and developed. It is the case that a number of volunteers were motivated specifically by the challenges of the pandemic and by their own temporary availability while other activity stopped. VAL

are continuing to work with all hubs to encourage them to maintain the engagement of new volunteers. The recent introduction of a new volunteering platform on the Doing Good Leeds website (launched in early October) will make it easier both for organisations to promote and manage their volunteering opportunities, but also for individual volunteers to manage their own volunteering activity.

- 3.11 Added to this, VAL worked with the Leeds Survivor Led Crisis Service (LSLCS) to develop a telephone support service to support the well-being of volunteers. The support line, which was staffed by volunteers, was available seven days a week up to the end of August. However due to low levels of demand, the service has been reduced, although people requiring support are able to call and leave a message for a volunteer to get back to them (noting that this is not a 'crisis' service but a 'listening ear'). What's important to note is that the infrastructure around this service has been kept in place by LSLCS and could be stepped up again if required
- 3.12 Scrutiny noted, "Complex needs, especially around mental health have been revealed through the Covid-19 response effort and should be reflected in plans for future locality based support". Ongoing work on the Third Sector Resilience Work Plan is continuing, with the Third Sector Resilience Communities Task Group (workstream 2) picking up this point in their ongoing work to explore how we can positively learn from the COVID response about the value of locally based and trusted support (both for communities of place and communities of interest).
- 3.13 Scrutiny noted the need for funding to support the work of the Community Care Hubs, as described above this has been addressed through to the end of the calendar year. More generally the VAL led approach to sector resilience is supporting work in this area, although not exclusively focussed on the hubs but rather the wider third sector. As detailed above, short-term funding has been secured for time-limited pilot projects, but it's VAL's aspiration to put this on a much more sustainable footing (with these pilot projects being one way of demonstrating the value of locally-led approaches through a test and learn model).

4. Corporate considerations

4.1 Consultation and engagement

- 4.1.1 Engagement continues between services within the council, with partners, with elected members and with the public. It has not always been possible to engage in the normal way about service changes, as there has been no choice about many of the changes to ensure compliance with national guidance. Engagement with stakeholders has continued and in many cases been strengthened with the context of what we have had to manage during this incident

4.2 Equality and diversity / cohesion and integration

- 4.2.1 Work has been taking place in Leeds to understand the disproportionate or differential impact on inequality that is happening due to COVID-19. This work is supported by Voluntary Action Leeds, Forum Central and a range of partners who provide specialist support to the city's diverse communities. This includes ongoing work gathering evidence of the impact on Communities of Interest, some of which is evidence based and some is based on direct community conversations in the form of a narrative. It also shows that there is considerable experiential overlap across many Communities of Interest. This work mirrors work that is being undertaken by Public Health on wider health inequalities of COVID-19.

4.2.2 This emerging evidence highlights that the COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated already inherent social and economic inequalities and we need to further understand what these impacts are on communities in Leeds. What it tells us so far mirrors national evidence and the local narrative that COVID-19 does have a disproportionate and differential impact based on where you live, your gender, your ethnicity and your job etc. For example, being unable to self-isolate due to insecure jobs and/or living in close proximity to each other in densely populated areas

4.3 Council policies and the Best Council Plan

- 4.3.1 The work referenced in this report has contributed to the Council's overall aim of tackling poverty and reducing inequalities. In particular it has focused on Safe, Strong Communities including -
- Keeping people safe from harm and protecting the most vulnerable.
 - Helping people out of financial hardship.
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Climate Emergency

4.3.2 The pandemic emergency has seen limited movement in the city over the past three months and a reduction in daily emissions. In that context, the volunteering programme has recruited volunteers local to the wards they are supporting and deployed effectively to minimise unnecessary vehicle journeys, wherever possible. Clearly, some vehicle journeys are inevitable when picking up shopping or medicines and delivering them to the resident and where possible, shopping trips have been to local shops. Although, this has not been the primary concern and delivering much needed food and medicines has been the priority.

4.4 Resources, procurement and value for money

- 4.4.1 Funding has been provided by Adults and Health Directorate direct to hubs for the period 1st April to 30th September 2020. Further funding has been drawn by the Council from Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, and an element of this has funded this work until 31 December 2020.
- 4.4.2 Community Committee wellbeing funds where appropriate to COVID-19 local activities. Where appropriate and supportive of voluntary hubs, existing funding has been re-purposed for COVID-19 work. A review has taken place with voluntary hubs on their experience over the past three months to inform immediate and longer-term resource requirements for a more sustainable programme.

4.5 Legal implications, Access to Information, and Call-in

- 4.5.1 This report does not contain any exempt or confidential information.

4.6 Risk Management

- 4.6.1 This project has been delivered within the context of the COVID-19 Leeds Strategic Response and Recovery Plan and risk management has been considered in that vein with the work being reported to the Citizens and Communities Silver Multi Agency Group chaired by the Director of Communities and Environment.

5. Conclusions

- 5.1 The Community Care volunteer hubs have continued to provide vital assistance to residents who have been in need of support through the pandemic period. The hubs have been shown to be committed and robust in the work required.

We expect the winter to be a challenging period, but expect that the hub network will be resilient to the challenges.

6. Recommendations

- 6.1 Note and comment on the content of this report.
- 6.2 Comment on ongoing local experience of the work of the Community Care Voluntary Hubs in local neighbourhoods

7. Background documents¹

- 7.1 None.

¹ The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.