

Coronavirus Pandemic VCSA Survey Feedback Report



May 2020 FINAL

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1. Background and Methodology

During April 2020, Shropshire Council and Shropshire VCS Assembly identified the need to learn more about the impact of the coronavirus pandemic within the community and on voluntary and community sector groups and organisations.

The Coronavirus Pandemic VCSA Survey was launched on the 20th April 2020 and closed on the 12th May 2020. The survey was open for 6 weeks and was sent out to VCSA members, members and placed on Shropshire Council's portal for all organisations and the public to engage with.

The surveys were promoted via the following methods:

- An email to all VCSA members requesting that they complete the survey.
- Promotion to VCS Assembly members via the weekly VCSA newsletter and direct emails.
- Direct emails to all VCSA Board members.
- Promotion by Shropshire Council's Communications Team and website portal.

The survey was designed to obtain feedback, and to:

- Understand the experiences of the voluntary and community sector and their response to the pandemic.
- Understand any current concerns and challenges, such as gaps in support.
- Demonstrate the broad role of the voluntary and community sector in their support of public services throughout the coronavirus pandemic.
- Promote the work of the VCSA organisations during the coronavirus pandemic.
- Consider trends and changes and inform future plans.

2. Survey Respondents

The survey was completed by a total of fifty-seven respondents from a variety of organisations and resulted in a considerable amount of feedback.

All survey respondents were asked where they were providing services in response to the coronavirus pandemic. This enables a better understanding of which parts of the county provided their opinions. Fifty-six survey respondents answered the question around their general area, with thirty going on to be more specific about the area that they were providing services in during the pandemic.

Table 1 shows the number of organisations in general areas:

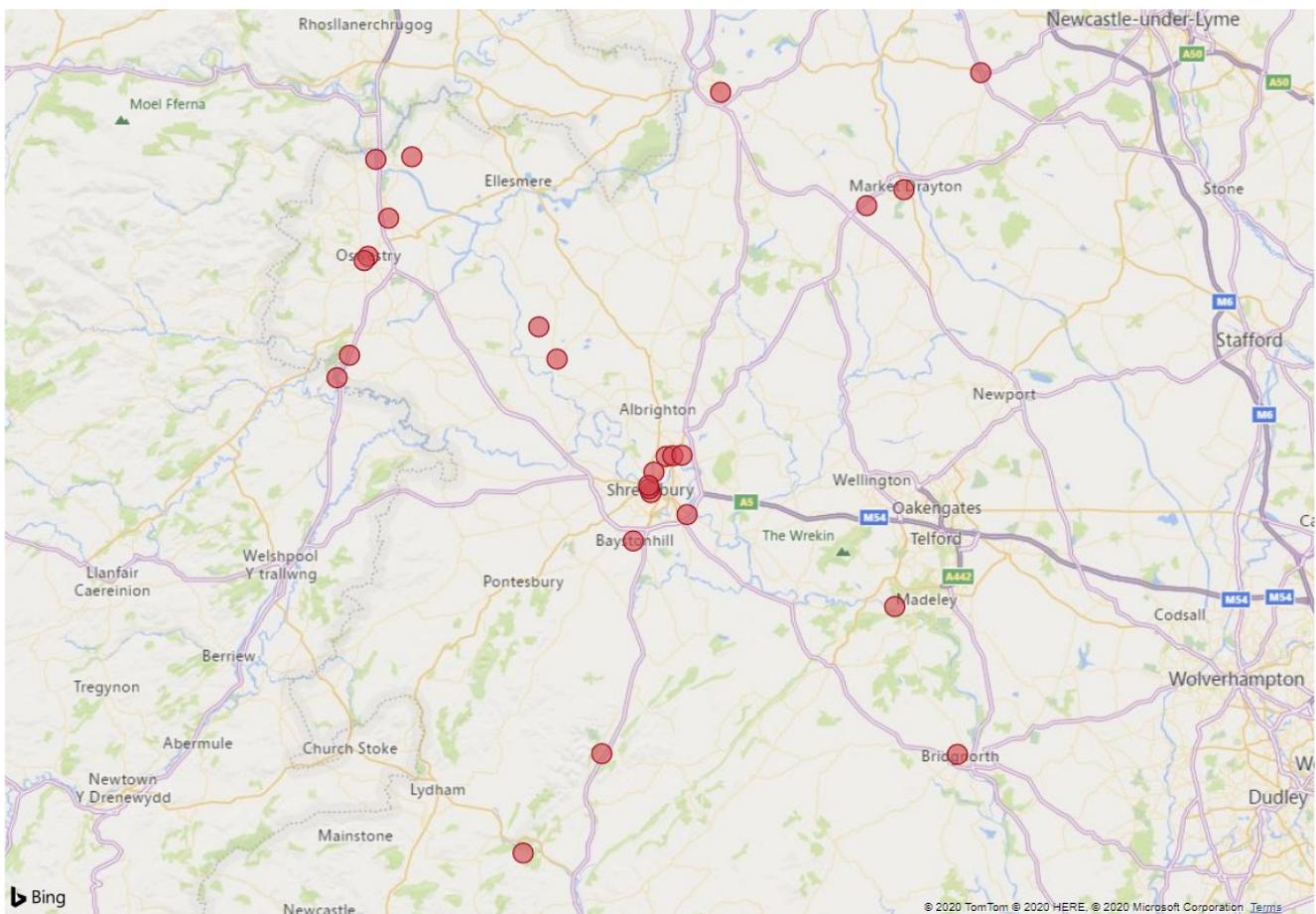
General Area	Number	%
Whole county	21	37
Specific town/area	30	52.5
South West	1	1.75
North West	2	3.5
North East	1	1.75
Central	1	1.75
Not answered	1	1.75
Total	57	100%

Table 2 shows the numbers of organisations providing services in more specific areas:

Specific Area	Number
Baschurch	2
Woore	1
Bridgnorth	1
Broseley	1
Whitchurch	2
Bayston Hill	1
Oswestry	3
LLanymynech	2
Craven Arms	1
Shrewsbury	2
Church Stretton	1
Market Drayton	1
Total	18

All survey respondents were asked what their organisation's postcode was. This enables a better understanding of the survey sample and where they operate in the county. It can be seen from the map below, that respondents to the survey, are spread all over the county with a cluster in the Shrewsbury area.

Chart 1 – Postcode mapping of survey Respondents



3. Organisations and their support during the coronavirus pandemic

Survey respondents were asked what support their group or organisation was currently providing in response to the coronavirus pandemic. A wide range of support is delivered by the survey respondents' organisations and groups. In particular, befriending is currently a main area of focus and online services and communication and food provision form a much greater proportion of support compared to previous surveys.

Twenty-eight survey respondents indicated that they were supporting the community with food provision, twenty-one were assisting people in collecting their prescriptions and medication and thirty-one were involved in befriending services. Ten organisations were providing face to face support in people's homes and ten were helping people with dog walking. Five groups were providing patient transport and five groups were providing non-health transport. The largest number of organisations, 31, were providing online services and communication to people, and fifteen were providing advice and benefits. Four survey respondents indicated that they were providing grants to other organisations and four that they were providing accommodation.

Thirty-six survey respondents classified the services they were providing as "other" and some of their comments are below:

- We are also sharing information updates from the local surgery and the council on our Facebook page. Also trying to keep up morale locally.
- Generally, we try and help in any way we can from picking up prescriptions and food to dog-walking and helping to support the local corner shop business stay open (crowd control).
- We are currently setting up deliveries of ambient wholefoods at reduced prices (including special diet foods) for the benefit of vulnerable and low-income residents who cannot afford health food shop prices or are in isolation and cannot risk going to the shops.
- the Haycop nature reserve includes public footpaths which the general public are using for their once daily exercise through the site. signage indicating social distancing measures are in place, and the site is inspected daily by volunteers
- Telephone calls as requested Planning for monthly virtual events for families, all free, leading up to the Caldecott festival planned for February 27th 2021. See facebook.com/caldecottfest/
- Provision and delivery of face visors
- Answering queries from the community
- SLS offers grants to sight impaired individuals on referral from a sight loss professional, but referrals are not being received during lockdown. Our office (located at The Lantern) maintains its normal opening hours (8.15am to 1pm, Monday to Thursday) via home-working by the part-time SLS Administrator, who is keeping our website and Facebook page up-to-date. We are also maintaining contact with other local sight loss charities in the Midlands and further afield. We support voluntary sight loss local social groups - there are some 15 or so of these affiliated to SLS in every part of Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin. We have kept in touch with all of these via email during the outbreak of Covid-19 providing relevant advice and information. We hope and encourage as many of these groups as possible to try to keep in touch with their individual members to ameliorate the debilitating effects of pro-longed social isolation.
- In addition to the online service Designs in Mind are preparing and delivering creative art and crafts kits to members (clients), enabling them to continue on their individual journeys. The work is intensive and supports people as individuals, recognising the recovery path they each take is different.
- Our village is a border village straddling Shropshire and Powys. we already have a relationship with PAVO, Carreghofa Community Council, Powys County Council and all the local doctors' surgeries (some within Shropshire) and are able to signpost people in need of a variety of assistance from financial and benefits advise to mental health assistance. We do not have such relationships set up for the Shropshire for our vulnerable users on the Shropshire side of the village as of yet but would like to establish these links.

- Including signposting, information sharing and gathering feedback from the public on health and social care services and the impact of the pandemic on their health, care and wellbeing through an on-line survey. We also provide the Independent Health Complaints Advocacy Service for Shropshire residents and people using NHS services in Shropshire.
- we are providing Targeted Early Help support to families via telephone, Whatsapp video calling, posting resources for children etc. as well as providing similar support to adults in the criminal justice system, women and young people who require an appropriate adult in the police station.
- Organising village grocery shopping & daily information email. Support to one family in Lydbury North with Coronavirus with shopping & health support (I'm a retired nurse) - person recovering.
- Considering the 'aftermath' and what can be done to help the residents and businesses in our communities when life returns to normal.
- Prayer - Spiritual support.
- We have some resources posted on our website in the form of books/text and encouragement to talk about death, dying and loss with friends, family and the community in which someone lives. However, we need assistance to put more things online during this time. It is sorely lacking in what we should have up.
- Hot meals delivery for people not able to cook for themselves - increased by 50% maintained support via phone to day service clients - starting to trial one-to-one day service support information and support to help people access services and remain independent medical journeys on ring and ride care 4 me hospital avoidance scheme supporting local foodbank with emergency parcels and delivery of food parcels to those on free school meal list. we have an emergency volunteer rota for us and local GPs to call on for emergencies such as prescription collection etc. (working with local shops we have rotas of volunteers supporting home shopping delivery services for 70+ and those vulnerable - approx 70 parcels a day being delivered)

Chart 2 – Type of support provided by organisations in response to the coronavirus pandemic.

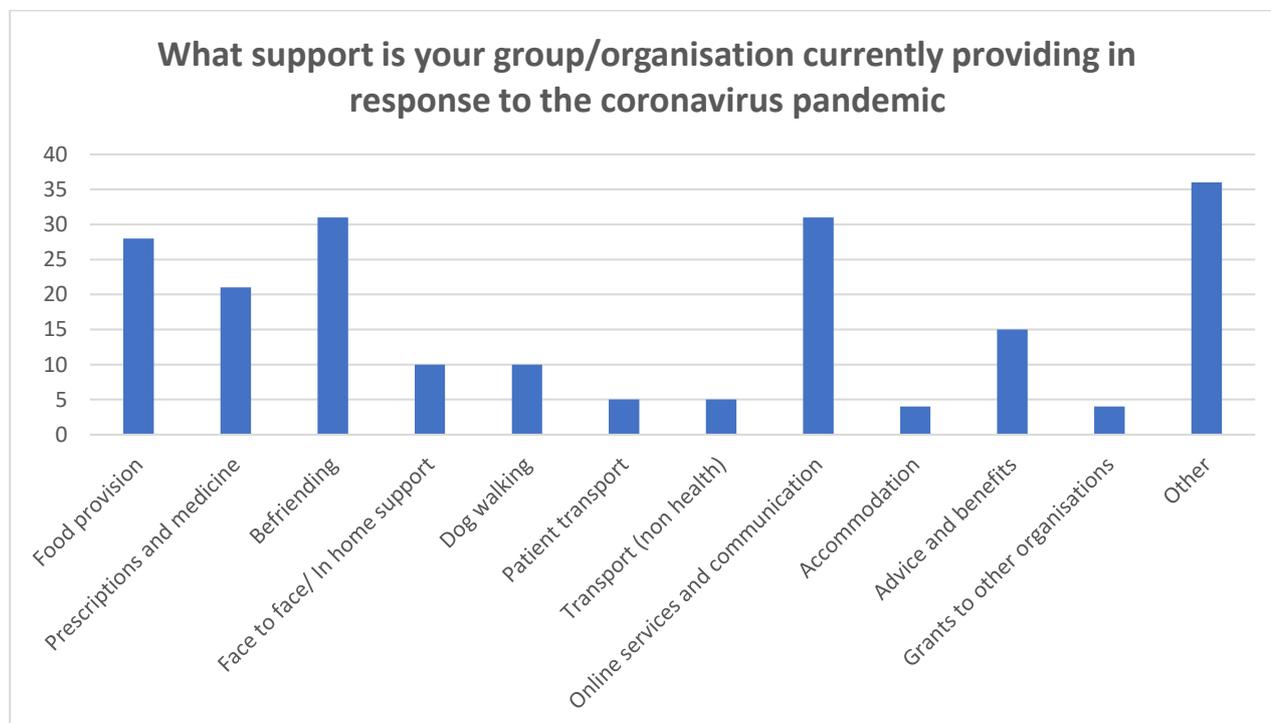


Table 3 displays the categories of additional support and shows that the sector is positive about local networks and referrals between local organisations and action taken by people to make a difference.

Many also feel positive about the future for their organisation, but many are concerned about their level of influence in Shropshire.

Survey respondents were then asked whether they thought they would be providing any additional support or services in the coming weeks. Twenty-seven organisations did not know at that time of they would, twenty-seven said that they would be providing additional services, with only three organisations/groups answering that they would not be providing additional services during the coronavirus pandemic.

This shows the uncertainty that groups and organisations were experiencing at this time, but also the tenacity of the sector on Shropshire for reacting to the pandemic, accepting change and reacting by providing services that were outside their usual remit in their communities. Nineteen respondents indicated that they were providing mental health services, with five organisations providing a service that supported people in the community following hospital stays/ residential care support. Five of the survey respondents indicated that they usually operated charity shops; these being closed during the pandemic would bring further financial pressures to the organisations.

Survey respondents were then asked to describe the additional support and services they were providing. Twenty-nine respondents answered this question. The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3 - Feedback summary of additional support and services

Additional support or services	Number	%
Online / telephone provision	14	48
Food / prescription	6	21
Network of support	2	7
React to need	4	14
Day centre support	1	3
Other	2	7
Total	29	100%

Examples of additional support and services given:

Online and telephone support

- Further online provision, advice, clinics, online events.
- We are looking at different ways to support people - virtual communities and more telephone support and befriending.
- Setting creative challenges to do at home - for an exhibition, new products and a new digital download service. For essential sense of purpose and worth.
- Facilitate online workshops, and support groups.
- We are designing alternatives for physical youth clubs.
- New on-line learning resources.
- We are considering virtual coffee mornings to tackle loneliness
- Online music sessions, for groups and 1:1, that are uplifting, joyful and help people stay connected and maintain good mental health
- We would like to provide some online information but need assistance to get it online.

Shopping and food provision

- We have been asked to distribute food parcels to those most vulnerable identified by the NHS.
- Hoping to organise food parcels to those who are falling through the gaps (vulnerable people who are not eligible through the government and council schemes). We are planning on adding craft materials /books into packages for families with children. Also, about to get our

volunteers sewing to help provide PPE locally within care homes and the local surgery. Also setting up a book swap system.

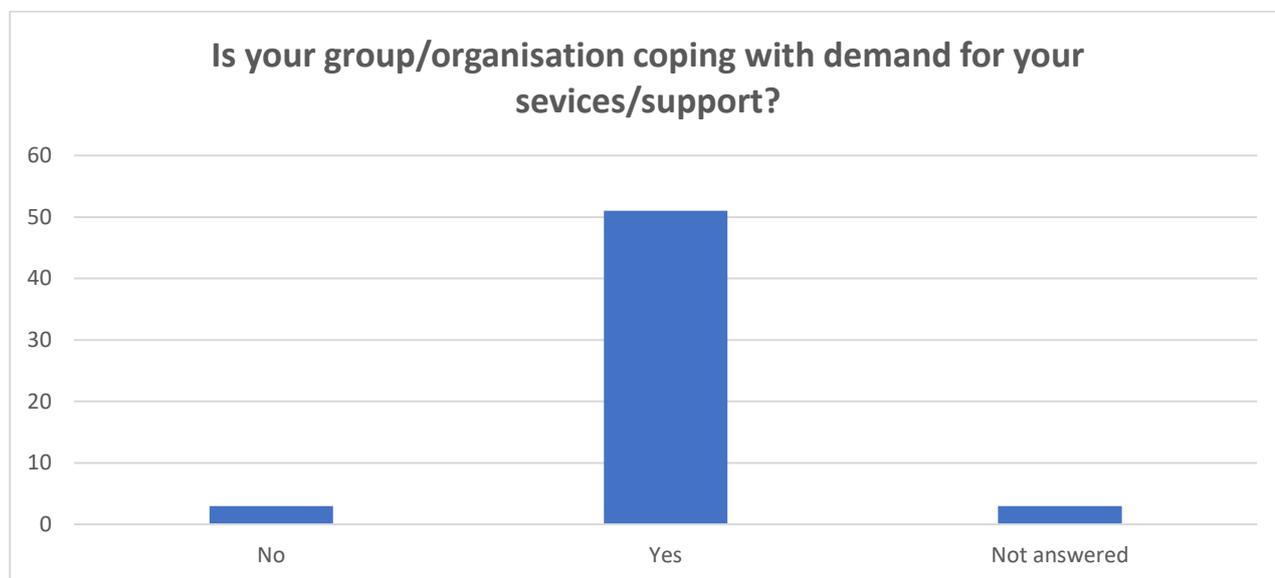
- More shopping and befriending.
- Additional shopping and help with collecting hearing aid batteries, wider medical/personal supplies.
- Emergency shopping service. Expanded telephone befriending and safe & well checks, contact with carers of people with a dementia, support packs to isolated older people.

Other support

- I would like to maintain a volunteer support network scheme for the elderly, vulnerable and just anyone who needs a hand.
- Mental health check ins provided by a local counsellor.
- We intend to offer a referral service to our members / service users offering to refer them to other support services they might need provided by e.g. the foodbank, local church groups in our network as well as council and other voluntary sector services.
- Reduced rent to day nursery that is accommodated at the Brownlow Community Centre as they are only serving care for 8 children of key workers instead of 50 a day.
- Not sure what at this stage as the situation changes, we need to respond; it isn't easy to see in what way things will change and therefore what will be needed.
- Starting to trial one-to-one day service support within Mayfair building.
- We will continue supplying enhanced services to clients of the Ark who are accommodated in the Prince Rupert Hotel (and other local hotels).
- Same kind of support but numbers likely to rise.
- We will respond to need.

Respondents were then asked whether they felt that their organisations were coping with demand for their services during the coronavirus pandemic. Fifty-one answered that they were coping with the demand, three indicated that they were not coping with the demand, and three respondents did not answer this question.

Chart 3 – Are organisations coping with the demand during the pandemic



Survey respondents were asked if their support was limited to particular beneficiary groups, and whether they were having to set clear eligibility for support. Twenty respondents indicated that their organisations had particular beneficiary groups and eligibility parameters.

Comments made by survey respondents included:

Vulnerable people and older people

- Supporting vulnerable people and those having to self-isolate who have no other means of support. Have referred some request to nearby parishes as they lived within a different parish boundary.
- Support for those isolating who have no other support in place
- Our support is mainly for older people and people who are vulnerable. Yes, we have applied the same criteria we normally would in that people have to have a need and/or a vulnerability.
- Elderly (70+) age group living in Bungalows on the Grange.
- Any older person and their carers, families or friends.
- Older people and their carers.

Specialist services and needs

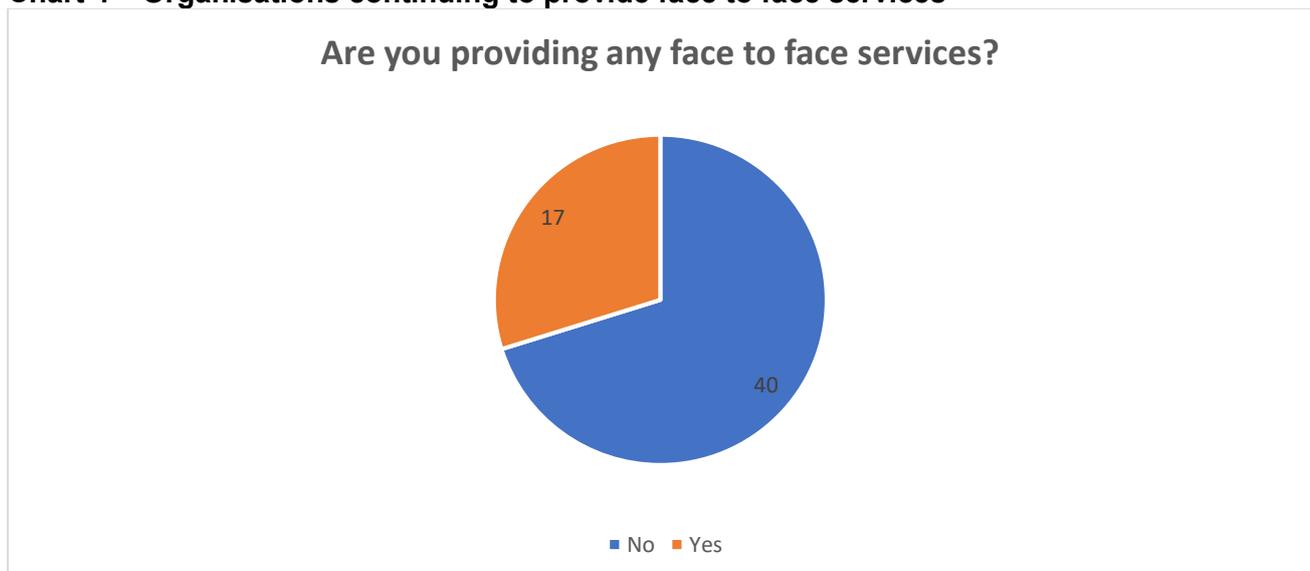
- All members (clients) are referred through mental health services.
- Yes - we only provide support to people affected by sight loss.
- People with mental health challenges or isolated (social distancing notwithstanding)
- Yes: Financial crisis.
- Young People aged 10 to 18.
- The Ark's services are available to any homeless and vulnerable people. During COVID-19 the vast majority of our work has focussed on the homeless, who have all been allocated accommodation in local hotels (most of them in the Prince Rupert) in conjunction with Shropshire Council staff. Inevitably, other vulnerable people who are not also homeless are further to the back of the queue.

Other

- NHS frontline staff.
- Yes, dependent upon funding stream.
- Yes. Not all needs can be met. Lack of tracheotomy community care teams in Shropshire. No equipment.
- Demand for help with children's IT kit to do remote lessons

Survey respondents were asked if they were continuing to provide face to face services. All fifty-seven respondents answered this question, with forty saying that they currently were not, and seventeen answered that they were continuing to provide face to face support during the pandemic.

Chart 4 – Organisations continuing to provide face to face services



Comments from respondents about the face to face support and services they were continuing to provide:

PPE and safety

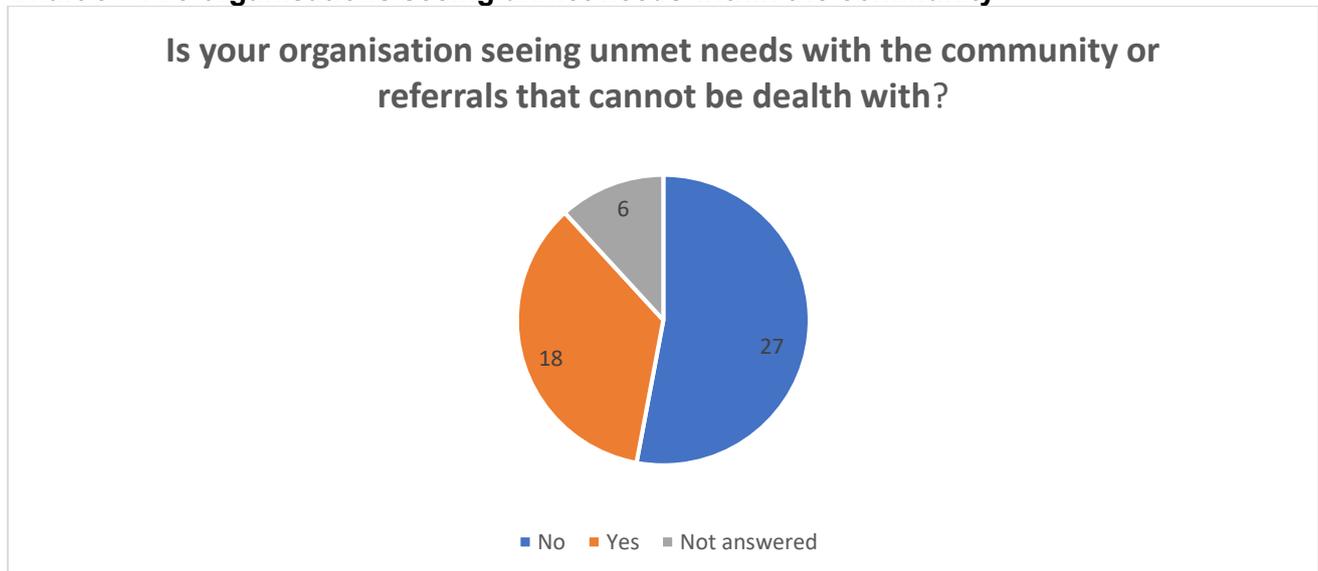
- We deliver groceries and prescriptions and whilst delivering we are checking welfare. we have adequate PPE as we conform to social distancing guidelines and have our own supply of face masks/ hand sanitiser
- We have now sourced some - hand sanitiser was difficult to obtain
- We have enough PPE at this time.
- We stocked up early in March. No help until last week from other quarters. Could be an on-going issues to resource.
- Yes - gloves are worn. We are offering shopping services & picking up of prescriptions.
- Most of our Mayfair meals deliveries are to the doorstep but a few require entry into the home. We have PPE and safety guidance for volunteers doing this. We have started trialling one-to-one day service support. Ring and ride take individuals to medical appointments. We have recently had a supply of face masks from Shropshire Council. It is difficult to access PPE especially hand sanitizer, gloves and masks but we have managed to date.
- We are able to maintain 2 metre social distancing and use alcohol-based hand sanitiser.

Changing service provision

- We have moved to a virtual platform
- Appropriate adult services only
- At present but we are running out, when we do, we will have to close the service.
- Only just but its tight and hard to get. if we run out will have to stop doing some things.
- We have had to suspend all face to face activity

Survey respondents were asked if they were seeing unmet needs within the community or referrals into your service that they could not respond to.

Chart 5 – Are organisations seeing unmet needs within the community



Comments made around unmet needs in the community included:

Need for support services

- More telephone/support. More ASB/neighbour issues as a result of people staying in their homes.

- A local temporary housing hostel has lost its internet and we have been asked if residents can use Mayfair. The buildings are closed to the public, so this is not possible at the moment.
- Many vulnerable /disabled people are falling through the gaps and not able to secure supermarket delivery slots.
- We shall be unable to respond to the full range of dietary needs, and to offer subsidised food to the neediest until we have built up our resources and traded for a while.
- Unmet need is supermarket deliveries to people over 70 and immunosuppressed in small villages.
- We are getting requests to help elderly isolators with things like hair cutting / gardening etc. but have had to turn them down due to lack of adequate PPE.
- We are unable to go into people's houses due to H&S of our volunteers, so there may be unmet need within the home for practical tasks (which we would have picked up prior to the pandemic).
- Increased needs for social care support where people have previously relied on friends / family.
- We have been getting request for more information on how to cope with death and loss and in addition, a significant level of distress among young people fearing a potential loss of parent or grandparent to the Coronavirus.
- People are understanding of the issues affecting services but are still struggling with ongoing days with children's mental health assessment and support. The suspension of the IAPT service had also affected some individuals. With lockdown continuing and people in fragile mental health states VCS services are filling the gaps.
- Some individuals (mercifully, only a very limited number) have been offered hotel accommodation but are not using it. Shropshire Council Housing Services are well aware of these individuals.

IT needs

- Need Council help to meet demand for IT equipment for remote schooling.

Transport Needs

- Hospital transport.
- Access to transport for hospital and other visits and we are very worried about carers in lockdown.

PPE, Risk and Safety

- Supply of PPE to frontline staff.

Capacity concerns

- There will be referrals that would have come to us through mental health services. We had to cease new referrals until we could find a way to do this. We are hoping to pilot a way forward in the next couple of months.
- Only calls we cannot answer due to capacity.
- We are seeing rising demand in response to our work to move services online showing that there is a latent demand for what we are able to do.

Needs being met currently

- Not that we are aware of. The concern is those who may go under the radar that we cannot reach try as we might.
- Not at the moment we have been able to respond or signpost people to other services.
- To the best of our knowledge this is not the case, and we hope the Council's own sensory impairment service continues to offer as much assistance as possible and may be aware of unmet needs that we are not aware of.

Other comments

- When we meet those with unmet needs, we are signposting the clients to relevant services.
- We have a number of jobs on hold.

- Once the lockdown is lifted there may be an expectation that help is no longer required but there is no guarantee that visitors will immediately come back. How can that gap be filled? Promotion of the area will be vital, but we are likely to have no income for at least 6 months.

4. Issues impacting on organisations in Shropshire

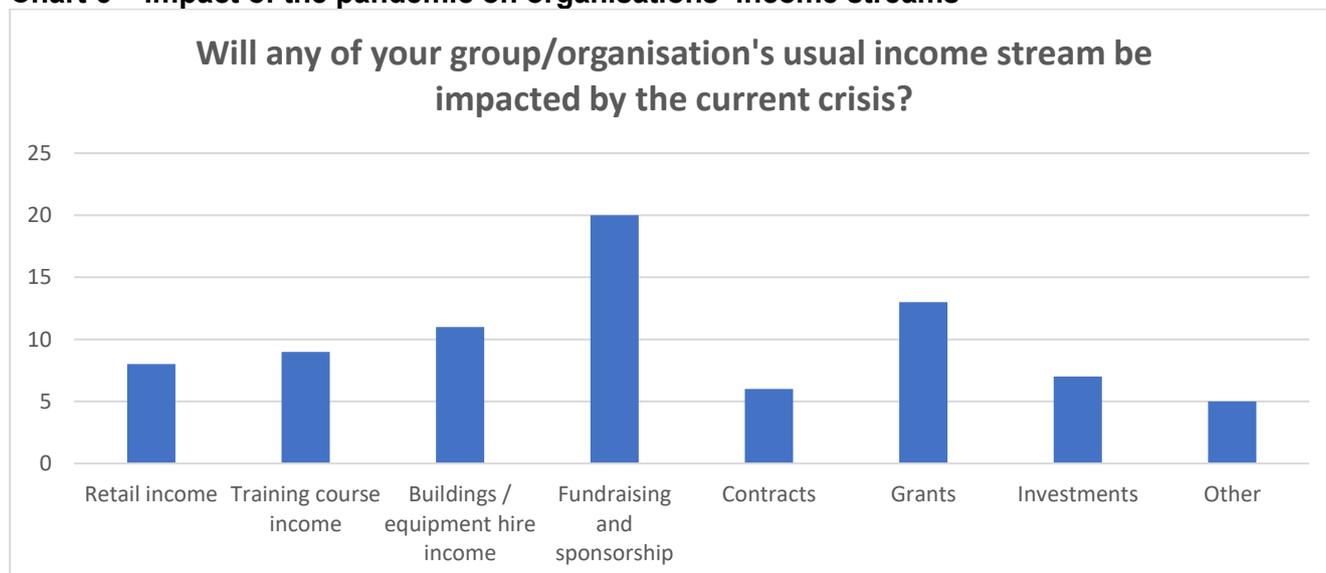
Survey respondents then were asked whether any of their group/organisation's usual income streams had been impacted by the current crisis. Anecdotal evidence suggests there are significant concerns within the voluntary and community sector relating to sustainability. The survey results reflected this. Many VCS organisations have been able to survive the economic challenges of recent years because they have diversified their income streams. However, the survey results show that that the pandemic has had an impact on all the income streams.

Fundraising and sponsorship is the top option, but it is important to consider all categories equally due to the different impact on organisations; the loss or reduction of one income stream is enough to lead organisations to consider their future viability when they are already working under financial pressure.

Table 4 – income streams affected by the coronavirus pandemic

Income stream affected	Number of organisations
Retail income	10
Training course income	11
Buildings / equipment hire income	14
Fundraising and sponsorship	25
Contracts	8
Grants	16
Investments	9
Other	6
Total	99

Chart 6 – Impact of the pandemic on organisations' income streams



Additional comments that organisations made about voluntary sector income included:

Overall Impact

- We anticipate that Covid will impact significant areas of our income. All training income is gone, as all training is face to face and we are yet to test the willingness of participants to pay

for online provision. We suspect people are mostly looking for free online content. Our income will be negative for training, as we are having to pay refunds for courses already booked.

- Café, catering, events – all affected.
- Retail income: loss of some £2,500 per month while the Shop is closed. Fundraising etc: some indication that individual donations have increased marginally as knowledge of our work to protect homeless & vulnerable people from the effects of COVID-19 has spread. But this may not continue. Grants: we are working hard to maintain, and even increase, grant income. Investments: not a major source of income, but interest & dividends will decrease.
- Admission charges and workshop fees.
- Regular giving by those who usually give weekly cash – disappeared. Fundraisers - will not take place. Waiving all funeral fees. Had to cash in shares - to pay large building project invoices and to cover a likely monthly deficit of £3,00 to £4,000 (or more - unsure as yet).
- We have worked hard to diversify our funding streams to be more sustainable for the future but that has been stopped immediately. Funding has been very hard for the last few years and with austerity having a huge impact too, charities are already fully stretched financially with low levels of reserves. I am very worried about the short- and long-term impact of this and where future funding will come from.
- I know mine are... I'm a severe asthmatic and can't physically volunteer to help, which is why I'm doing co-ordinator role. The phone co-ordinators are semi-retired but I'm not sure. I can't speak for the other volunteers as I don't deal with them, we do everything via WhatsApp so don't actually see them.
- We promote Oswestry by raising income from membership and advertising. Almost all members are now closed. Their membership for this year which has funded the Oswestry brochure, web site and Social media has now been wasted. We have no idea when our accommodation providers will be able to open again and then where their visitors will come from. Most events are now cancelled so again there will be no visitors coming to the area. The Town Council has said that as the TIC is not open then their contribution to operate is likely to be stopped. We now have NO income.
- All income is generated through commercial work for MedAid Services Ltd. As no work is available, volunteers are using our fleet of vehicles to support the local community with prescription collection/delivery and transportation of medical equipment/supplies as needed. The business also has a charitable arm (MedAid Services Community Initiative, registered charity number 1168963). We deliver community first aid courses and receive donations through doing this. As a result of coronavirus, we are not delivering any of the courses at this time, and so are not expecting any donations. The charity has zero outgoings, therefore this is not of a concern to us at this moment in time.
- To date day service contracts with Shropshire Council have not been affected. This is due to be reviewed end June/July which could have a massive impact. Other income impacted is from healthy living classes such as arts and exercise. Both our community cafes have had to close with a loss of income. We have received a covid business support grant which has been a big help. Traditional fundraising has come to a halt - street collection, annual fayre and books sale were due to take place in last few weeks; which would have generated approx. £4-6K. We have secured additional grants that have been made available for the crisis, but these are generally very short-term funds for certain activities for a few months at most.
- This applies to our broader organisational income streams. Our Shropshire service is funded by Shropshire Council and we believe this will continue but many of our Head office functions are funded by fundraising.
- We also charge fees for some of our services so we will also lose this. Many of our grants are not FCR and we top up with our own income gen so we now face the dilemma that we cannot furlough grant funded staff but don't have enough income to cover their costs. We will be talking to commissioners about this.

Fundraising

- The crises put an end to our fundraising activity including a sponsored cycle, online crowdfunding, quiz-nights and appeals for donations and free-interest loans from local

supporters. Aside from stopping our voluntary fundraising activity, it (understandably) distracted attention and broke the momentum of our campaign.

- We regularly have a quiz night fundraiser which we have cancelled. Lost approx £900. we may need to cancel our annual open day early July. Lost £700, and we sell jam and cards. Lost approx £100; all in aid of the maintenance of the Haycop nature reserve.

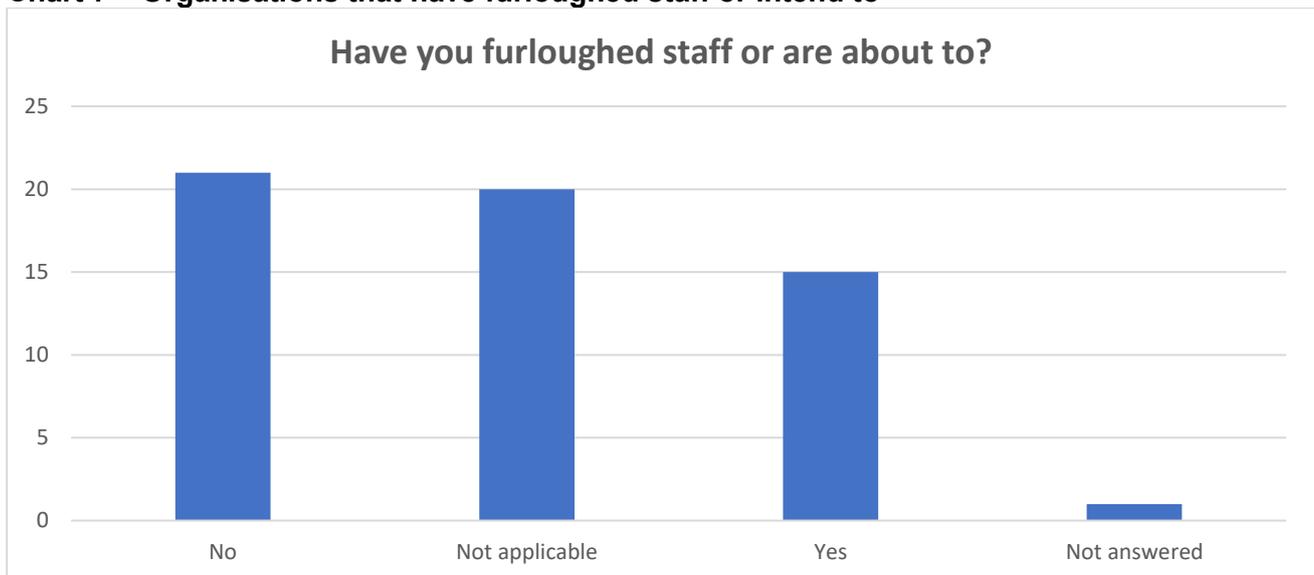
Grants and income

- We were nominated for a Queens Award, which is delayed. This also effects our ability to write and get grants. Two grants we applied for have been delayed/postponed or cancelled.
- Currently almost all external grants are focused on the Covid response which is fine but
- means finding funding for other developments is hard.
- Grant applied for to cover fuel costs for volunteer drivers delivering supplies to residents.

Other comments

- Retirement provides all funding I need.
- We are desperate to ensure we have a business that members, staff and volunteers to return too.

Chart 7 – Organisations that have furloughed staff or intend to

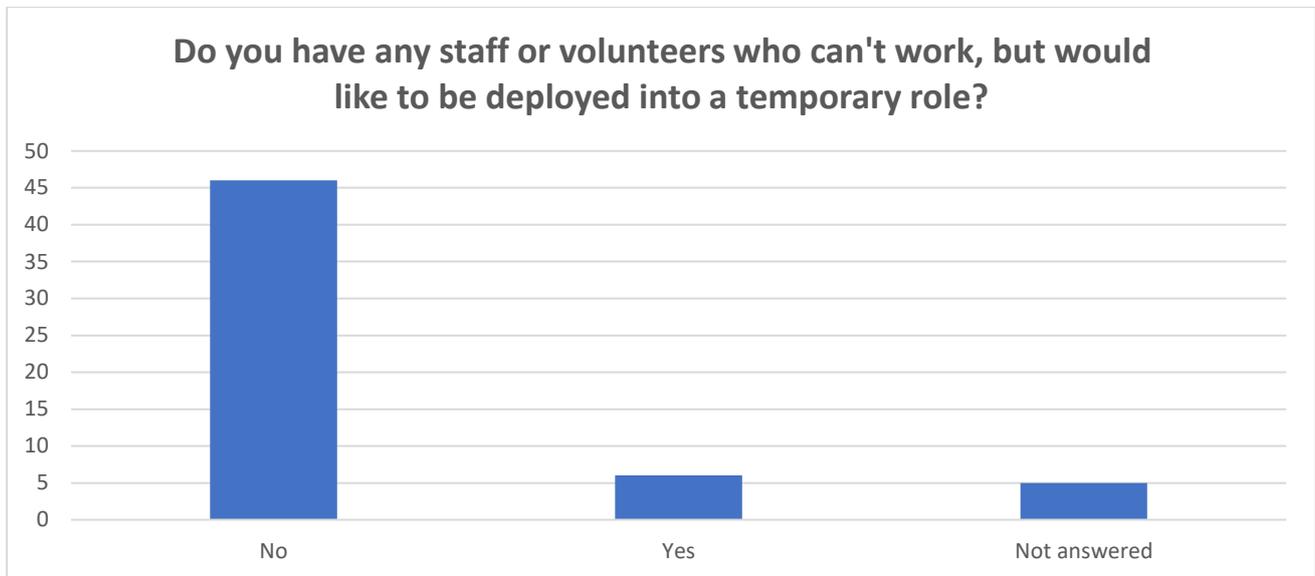


15 organisations had taken the opportunity to furlough staff, using the government scheme. This may have helped to take the financial pressure off some organisations in the short term, but could have led to other challenges such as challenges meeting demand for support, fewer paid staff to support volunteers etc.

Of the fifty-seven organisations/groups that responded, they had retained a total of 199 employed staff. The fifty-seven organisations/groups had retained a total of 774 volunteers who were undertaking a total of 1,451.5 hours between them; meaning an average of 25.46 volunteer hours per organisation and an average 1.87 hours per volunteer.

Chart 8 highlights that most VCS groups and organisations were not in a position where they had spare capacity in their volunteer workforce. Most were making good use of the volunteer support available to them or were protecting volunteers who were older and needed to be shielded.

Chart 8 – Staff or volunteers who can't work, but would like to be deployed into a temporary role



7. Opportunities for the future

Survey respondents were asked if they had any other comments that they wanted Shropshire VCS Assembly, Shropshire Council and partners to consider when working to plan a response to the pandemic and recovery following the pandemic. Thirty out of the fifty-seven respondents expressed suggestions.

The main themes centred on organisations working together with Shropshire Council, town and parish councils and alongside other voluntary and community organisations, so as not to replicate each other’s work. Organisations and groups have adapted and have worked creatively to meet the needs of the communities that they support. Whilst groups are grateful for the financial support that they have received in grants, the issue of funding for the recovery period and future development was a prominent one. There have been many provisions made for specific Covid-19 grants, but organisations are concerned about the future feasibility of their non pandemic-related work, as their financial reserves diminish. The newer groups set up since the start of the coronavirus pandemic expressed that they would require further guidance and support from the local authority, and indeed all organisations and groups will benefit from the continued sharing of information and advice.

Comments made by survey respondents about these issues included:

Financial issues and grants

- We have looked at the grant for DMOs, but we are not a recognised DMO and as OTC funds us to open the Visitor Centre our income is under the 50% limit for qualification. To produce marketing products for 2021 we will need to look for funding.
- Grants will be needed for community centres to keep them open, for day nursery with only children of key workers, incurring costs and income almost nil. If the crisis continues after August, we will be in real financial difficulty.
- Funding would enable us to purchase PPE to offer additional services, it would also help alleviate any financial burden on the volunteers (fuel cost etc.) when completing tasks amongst other things.
- Rebuilding trade and recovering lost earnings will be an issue after this crisis, we are currently using our reserves.
- Re grants. We understand that it is the parish council who apply for grants from Shropshire Council. We have been given a grant from the parish council directly from their funds.

- We would like to apply for any funding that would assist us in providing more online assistance to those in distress who are homebound during this lockdown.

Infrastructure support

- Help unofficial groups.
- I would like some reimbursement for printing costs and the phone.
- Good recovery loan templates be good to have something like this.
- Organisations will need help and support with their business recovery plans, there is a lack of information and advice out there on how to do this at present.

Engagement and partnership

- So far some of us have been assisting the Foodbank in various ways, have collected prescriptions and shopping where asked, and are registered with the NHS telephone help scheme.
- Shropshire council officers have been very supportive and responsive. This is enormously helpful.
- We are keen not to replicate or compete with other groups so please let us know of any local services we should be working with.
- Would like to hear from local councillors and co-ordinate any care support.

Challenges

- We set up our group on the 16th March as we knew there would be residents being advised to shield and that would leave them in a vulnerable position, since then Powys have been very proactive in using us to provide assistance but as a group our village encompasses both Powys and Shropshire and so I do not want to be being able to provide assistance to predominantly one half of the village. We have over 27 users of our services on the Shropshire side and are registered with 2 Shropshire surgeries. We originally tried to reach out to form links when we first started the group but haven't heard anything back.
- We are an organisation with funding specific for these areas, already known to Shropshire Council, but we are having to actively seek out relevant information rather than it being pushed to us. We are signed up for all the newsletters, but we missed the information about the grants being made available for Community groups as it wasn't on any of the newsletters that we can sign up for. Consistent distribution of information to all is key.

The response

- Visor Bikes was set up to help deliver face visors to frontline staff from various producers. All involved are also volunteer Blood Bikers and therefore command respect from those we help and the community that supports us.
- We have made it a priority of ours, from the beginning of these difficult times, to keep people creative and purposeful. This positive encouragement has been essential as it is so easy to get lost in the negative, sad and difficult news that is predominantly being shared. Anxiety is high and growing now for more people and we are actively seeing this changing every day, in the people we are working with. We will continue to develop new ways of working and try to ensure we keep the organisation sustainable.
- Family support workers, volunteers and keyworkers have demonstrated creativity and innovation in developing ways of working with individuals and families in circumstances where there cannot be direct contact. Workers are using video calling to connect with parents and children and encouraging physical activities as well as study. Parents appreciate the support particularly when they are isolated away from other usual means of support. Young carers are being offered regular telephone support calls as well as Facebook group chats.
- Discuss delivery services with the big supermarkets so village drops can be organised instead of individual customers.

The future and learning

- Start earlier!
- Remember the power of music to transform people's state, feel connected to others and be resilient in a crisis.
- We need to invest in systems that allow us to work from home quicker as we move in and out of lock down e.g. VOIP. We need to build in capacity into the organisation as we expect a rise in debt issues, homelessness and evictions as people are unable to pay rent etc following the hold on eviction action - especially around private landlords - could do with having an advice presence at courts to provide advice as well as more money advisers. Also, people have been applying for UC too quickly and will lose out on income due to them; self-employed people who have not been able to access government schemes will need advice.
- I am really concerned about the aftermath of the pandemic. All the funding currently seems to be focussed on people who are responding directly but, in most cases, they don't need money - just volunteers with lots of enthusiasm and energy. The biggest "hit" will be those organisations that cannot survive the loss of income during this period.

Other comments

- We have experience in dealing with Crisis recovery that we would be prepared to share.
- There is still a problem in Broseley of youths gathering and including on the Haycop nature reserve. this has been reported to the police by members of the committee and volunteers, and the general public. there is little youth provision in Broseley.

A main message from the comments is the importance of information, communication and support to enable VCS groups and organisations to deliver support on the ground.

8. Summary

The feedback received was comprehensive, with considered comments and constructive suggestions and examples. Some of the main issues included:

Financial concerns

- Voluntary and community organisations have been facing challenges due to reduced funding and losses of public sector support for some time. Many organisations on short term contracts have faced uncertain futures and this crisis has further emphasised a lack of sustainability within the sector. It is likely that the rate of closures will increase following the pandemic unless investment can be found.
- VCS organisations relying from income from room booking, training, charity shops and transport are really concerned. Particular challenges were raised very early on in the pandemic by village hall committees and charity shops.
- Recession is likely to negatively impact on charitable giving and some fundraising activity is not possible during the social restrictions/lockdown.
- Funding is an issue for organisational recovery for the majority of organisations.
- There are concerns that funds may have been diverted into coronavirus grant schemes and that some funders and charitable trusts will have less to offer at a later date. The longer-term impact of recent investments is a concern.
- Some VCS organisations will have had to furlough staff but for many the first step to exploring this has meant facing additional costs buying in HR advice and support.
- VCS managers talk about the possibility of having to make difficult decisions and future redundancies where there are paid staff.
- Current responses to the pandemic require investment in core costs such as IT infrastructure. Many VCS organisations don't have the available budgets to invest.
- Some believe that the sector will inevitably shrink, since many organisations have been struggling for the past few years. (There is also a fear that this will add pressure on those remaining). Anecdotal evidence suggests organisations have run out of reserves now and some organisations you would imagine will be in 'good health' are on the brink of collapse.

Infrastructure and the needs of small groups

- VCS organisations still delivering face to face support are facing increased costs – some may need to try and source Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). They aren't being supported like NHS and care providers are.
- A lot of activity is being delivered by unregistered groups. Outside of the survey some have argued for funds to be made available to individuals (some grant schemes already do this, but it is a little more difficult to administer). It is feedback that could be considered but it is an issue that may not be resolved.
- Smaller rural groups have been financially supported by parish councils. That has been very effective and further strengthened local partnerships.
- Smaller rural groups are needing support with digital technology / online meetings. Some are concerned about digital exclusion and see families and individuals with limited access to broadband either because of cost or because of lack of infrastructure particularly in the south of the county.
- Shropshire doesn't have a Community Foundation (Shropshire RCC does it's best to alleviate this gap). The main funds for the VCS have so far been channelled through Community Foundations and there is a concern that Staffordshire may not have the local knowledge to appropriately allocate funds in Shropshire.
- Many of the smaller community groups are in rural communities and have expressed concerns that the strong communication with larger organisations will die down as the pandemic does.
- VCS and private sector partnerships have developed and that is seen as a real positive.

Volunteering

- Volunteers are putting themselves at risk and some are going above and beyond. VCS groups and organisations are concerned about their volunteers and how to best protect them. Many are concerned about the mental health of their staff and volunteers and burn out.
- Many volunteers have been lost due to their age (over 70) and shielding. Although 'lost' because they are shielded many managers fear volunteers won't return for many reasons, and partly because of the pressures of roles.
- There is a feeling / worry that many of the volunteers in the newer Covid-19 groups will be lost as they return to work.
- There are concerns that volunteer brokerage capacity in the county is essential but currently under-funded.
- There are fears that without funds to recruit younger/new volunteers after the crisis, there will be a long-term impact on the size of the volunteer workforce.
- The role of trustees is important but increasingly trustees are difficult to retain, and they are taking on significant responsibilities and personal risks.

Community needs

- Food banks are in high demand and have raised concerns about the lack of infrastructure support for small groups.
- Unmet need is supermarket deliveries to people over 70 and immunosuppressed in small villages.
- Some types of VCS service are seeing increases in demand. Befriending services are in particular demand, a lack of investment in this type of less formal support over recent years means there are few services offering this type of support in the county so those services still in place are seeing increased pressure.
- Many are worried they won't cope if we have a big recession and more people end up in hardship and debt (with basic needs not being met). Others are worried that people getting more regular support now will start to rely on it and they may not be able to keep up regular befriending calls etc. after the crisis.
- Some are concerned that we could see more prejudice and discrimination in future (these concerns are based on research and news about social change).

- Mental health support is a concern shared widely. There have been concerns for a while now about finding people in very distressing situations and not feeling like there is adequate support or training to help people.

The survey generated important feedback and has highlighted the issues that are currently being considered within the voluntary and community sector. The feedback has also provided an insight into recent changes. The points made demonstrate the importance of understanding organisational/group and community needs. It is hoped that by working together some of those issues can be addressed and support provided. This feedback report will be shared with Shropshire VCS Assembly Board, partners agencies and those coordinating the coronavirus response within Shropshire Council.

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