

People at the Centre Update 23



What is striking from the COVID-19 pandemic is the impact it has had on communities: the combination of lockdown, awareness of loneliness and inequalities and the need to respond quickly has changed communities and their relationship with local authorities, government and the third sector.

Learning from the Carnegie UK Trust report "COVID-19 and Communities Listening Project: A Shared Response" and findings from People at the Centre's Community Resilience workstream (based on several organisations' feedback) explore these new relationships and what this might mean for the future.

What type of responses ?

The Carnegie UK Trust report highlights different levels of responses:

- hyperlocal responses driven by what is often a renewed sense of community, but which might be threatened as the impact of the pandemic becomes heavier, as existing inequalities grow bigger, and as the initial wave of solidarity fades
- local authority responses, with services being reorganised around the response to the pandemic and, sometimes, better responsiveness which meant that local authorities were better appreciated by communities

Prior to lockdown being announced, we understood that the virus was a significant risk to life and that it had potential to cause significant damage. We also understood that our communities would no doubt require significant support to see through the pandemic and we knew that the Council itself could not provide that support

alone. So early in March, we pulled together our community focused staff with the intention to placing a call to action of any community group who felt that they could assist. – East Ayrshire Council

- Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector responses which often felt more valued as true and equal partners to the public sector in the response to the pandemic and who benefited from easier access to funding
- partnership responses which showed that it is possible to work in partnership at short notice and to mobilise around a common goal.

There was evidence of greater partnership working and eagerness to collaborate to problem solve and share experiences. Responsiveness of external agencies and others to requests for help, knowledge and advice was excellent. There was also a level of responsiveness to the needs of other and supporting environments – Marie Curie

What can we learn from this for the future?

Both pieces of work highlight common themes:

- The future has to be more local, especially since community and third sector organisations have shown that, thanks to their knowledge of their communities, they can react quickly to the challenges in their area, identifying those that need help the most and responding to issues with partnership working and coordination. This ties in with themes of community empowerment.
- The future has to rely more on partnership working. This has proven to be possible during the pandemic, which has forced partnership working. One of its unintended consequences is that agencies have accepted a more collaborative way of working, and that the experience of working together has highlighted the value of understanding and respecting the challenges

that partners face within their own organisations and appreciating some of the organisational constraints on them.

The collaborative approach was highly successful and ensured person-centred care continued to lead decision making. As a result of the positive impact of the Community Hub on patients, their families and staff, it will become a permanent feature of our Glasgow Hospice services as new levels of normality start to emerge. – Marie Curie

As it became clear that a lockdown was imminent and that vulnerable people would need additional support, our local minister, the Manager of the local YMCA and the Chief Officer of VABS (Voluntary Action Badenoch and Strathspey) came together to create 'Grantown Here to Help.' At the same time a Facebook page 'Grantown COVID-19 Mutual Aid' was created. - Grantown Here to Help and Mutual Aid

- The future has to rely less on performance management and short-term funding, and more on wellbeing and long-term investment. Funding has often been an issue highlighted by third sector organisations as a barrier to long-term investment in communities. Likewise, focusing on performance prevents from working in partnership as every organisation is trying to reach individual targets.

Our community approach is far more than providing food; its connecting on a human level, raising self-esteem and worth. Our engagement is always about treating people with respect, who have rights, strengths and aspirations. Our team is viewed as a trusted provider of assistance, returning weekly and carrying out any actions agreed.

We seek resources reflective of the demands and impact; and enabling us planning for ongoing support, opposed to uncertainty of limited funding. We have an understanding of local needs where other services are unable to connect. It shouldn't be about competitive tendering! – Recovery Enterprises Scotland