GREATER MANCHESTER VCSE SECTOR AND IMPACT OF CORONAVIRUS

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For information to:
GMCA & GM H&SC Partnership
DCMS
NCVO, NAVCA, SEUK

CC
GM VCSE Leadership Group https://vcseleadershipgm.org.uk/
10GM http://www.10gm.org.uk/ & **local VCSE infrastructure organisations** (listed at https://www.gmcvo.org.uk/resources/support-organisations)

NB This is information collated over the last ten days. Obviously the picture is changing rapidly. New concerns and needs will be identified.

VCSE SECTOR: OUR IMMEDIATE RESPONSE

1. We are responding as a sector to the current crisis. **VCSE organisations are right on the frontline in every locality** - holding back a tidal wave of demand for access to formal services, disseminating information to the public, and collaborating with the public sector and local businesses to try to help those most in need.

2. The VCSE infrastructure has no capacity to collect quantitative data on the ground (even if we had capacity, groups would not have capacity to respond) but we do have very good connectivity and established leadership across our sector so **we have a live 'feel' for what is going on** in communities and are starting to collect 'stories'.

3. Within localities, 10GM members, Thrive, Synergy and Bury VCFSA are acting as co-ordinating points to connect public and VCSE sector activities. In 10GM boroughs, **local infrastructure is leading on the placement of volunteers and the support for mutual aid networks**. 10GM is also trying to support boroughs with less developed local infrastructure.

4. At GM level **John Hannen** john.hannen@gmcvo.org.uk will act as primary link between public and VCSE sectors. He will connect with GMCA and the H&SC Partnership, the VCSE Leadership Group and 10GM and other local infrastructure, and with business infrastructure and national VCSE infrastructure, to try to ensure smooth information flow in all directions.

5. As a Leadership Group we will ensure we have **suitable VCSE people attending any multi-sectoral forums**. The **infrastructure organisations will be holding a weekly meeting** to share updates on developments and responses. We will seek to provide consistent and comprehensive **advice and information to our own sector.**

6. We will also continue to **lobby government** through DCMS and our own national infrastructure, to ensure the needs of local VCSE organisations are understood. We welcome the support of GM public and business sectors in doing this.

7. We plan to collect and disseminate **examples of good practice in the reconfiguration of existing services** (such as BAND in Bolton re-organising mental health support services to be delivered largely by phone, with skeleton face to face service for emergencies) and the **emergence of new initiatives** (such as the mutual aid network in Ramsbottom providing home delivery of medication for Lloyds Pharmacy). This will help other groups.

8. **10GM members** are drawing up **key principles for 'informal volunteering'**, to reduce the risk to volunteers and beneficiaries in the absence of the usual safeguarding and health and safety checks. Macc has deployed a worker to link to the GM Mutual Aid Networks.

9. We are collaborating with the GM Mayor over the **proposed platform to help coordinate volunteering efforts** to ensure this connects with the existing volunteering brokerage services and local infrastructure can assist with deploying people on the ground. **Macc is leading on this**.

10. **Healthwatches** are putting out some good simple messages for the public: their expertise in doing this can be tapped into.

WHAT IS HAPPENING TO OUR SECTOR

11. The expected impact of an economic shock like this on the GM VCSE sector has already been considered in GM in preparation for the risk of a hard or unplanned Brexit-: **loss of jobs, volunteers and organisations; alongside hugely increased demand from people in crisis** for advice, emergency aid, mental health & domestic violence services. These risks are already acknowledged within GM.

12. The impact of covid-19 and measures intended to mitigate transmission have added to this. Voluntary, community and faith groups, charities and social enterprises in GM are already acknowledged to be hugely significant providers of services and support to people and communities including health and social care, wellbeing and community support, mental health services, support for older people, support for carers and parents, providers of food banks and emergency aid i.e. all the **help now needed to enable people to cope with the impact of both covid-19 and its mitigation**.

13. Like statutory services, our sector was **already stretched**, with need outstripping capacity, but nevertheless we have been mobilising alongside public sector colleagues and have collectively identified our 'offer and ask' (VCSE Policy Paper).

14. Now like all SMEs, VCSE organisations are facing **massive uncertainty** with regard to income and resources along with **reduced capacity** with staff and volunteers on sick leave or self-isolating.

15. Most **grant and contract income** is predicated on the delivery of activities and outcomes which are now unachievable. **Opportunities to apply for grants or bid for contracts** are being delayed. Organisations are trying to **reconfigure** activities and services to deliver them differently. But most of us are **not well-equipped** with the policies, safeguards, hardware or software that we need to do this quickly or well.

16. Social enterprises and trading charities are impacted in the same way as other SMEs re **loss of trading income**, inability to reduce costs without laying off staff, inability to make repayments on loans. Most of our social traders are in sectors that trade directly with the public, including a big hospitality sector, and are at high risk.

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17. We are seeing long-term **inequalities** and lack of investment in our sector reflected in the support we can now offer to different communities; for example we had lost most of our **volunteering infrastructure, carer support organisations, and legal advice sector**. Our most disadvantaged neighbourhoods and communities of identity are least well served and networked. **Areas without a strong local infrastructure organisation** are finding it harder to mobilise collectively.

18. **Foodbanks** are experiencing a shortage of donations, vehicles and volunteers just when they are most needed.

19. We have some **concerns that some community groups are trying to carry on as usual**, due to demand from beneficiaries (for example Faith Network for Manchester is trying to stop the independent churches from holding services).

20. We are concerned that as deaths start to occur with greater frequency, there will be an **increasing need for practical and personal support for bereaved people**; VCSE and faith organisations will be the first port of call.

WHAT VCSE ORGANISATIONS ARE REPORTING ABOUT PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES

21. People in insecure work are being laid off and there are reports of redundancies being made without correct consultation. Reports of people being threatened with eviction. **Surge in demand for advice** from individuals on employment and tenancy rights, help to claim benefits.

22. Mental health support organisations are seeing **rising levels of mental ill health and anxiety** amongst existing service users. We have real concerns that the **stress of social isolation and fear of infection** will impact more widely on the mental health of our own workforce and the wider public.

23. There is concern from disabled people's groups re **personal assistants**: these are often employed directly by the disabled person, and there is no easy way to find cover quickly if their PAs are prevented from attending them.

24. As hospitals empty of all but the most severely ill patients, **carers are under increased pressure**. Many carers look after someone single-handed, and there is concern about adequate back-up if the carer becomes unwell.

25. Businesses are no longer offering pre-employment support to **people on employment programmes**, and many are no longer recruiting.

HOW TO HELP US TO HELP PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES

26. Above all we ask all our partners in the public and business sectors to **work collaboratively with us** – please don't reinvent wheels or bypass our established leadership and co-ordination systems. Contact local infrastructure organisations https://www.gmcvo.org.uk/resources/support-organisations to find out how to deploy volunteers and donations, and how to help local food banks and community groups.

27. Most GM local authorities have published statements of intent similar to those put out last week by London Funders and the. A statement from GMCA / H&SCP is imminent. Links have been recognised with the VCSE Policy Paper https://www.gmcvo.org.uk/publications/vcse-policy-position-paperand VCSE Commissioning Framework https://www.gmcvo.org.uk/publications/vcse-commissioning-framework-and-delivery-plan. We **urgently need confirmation from all commissioners and grant-makers**:-

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a. **roll over grants and contracts** at year end without the need for formal applications or assessments;
b. **flexibility about what any funding is used for** over the next few months, given many planned outputs cannot be achieved, and other priorities have emerged;
c. clarification as to what flexibility is permissible where b) is not within the control of local commissioners (e.g. funding derived from EU funds);
d. **relaxation of reporting and monitoring requirements**, to allow capacity to be directed to outward-facing work;

28. We need local government to **prioritise VCSE frontline and local infrastructure organisations** as *'businesses experiencing heavy additional demand'* and '*businesses that are in trouble'* for the receipt of grant funding, so that we can **continue and increase our work**.

29. We need **all social investors to give loan repayment holidays** to investees. Access to Growth has made provision for this:- GMCVO is offering all our investees a 6 month interest and capital repayment free period, with the additional 6 month term on their investments.

30. We need accurate **advice from local government about the process for VCSE organisations** to claim the various benefits listed at https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/covid-19-support-for-businesses

31. We need **IT resources** such laptops and smartphones, subscriptions to software such as MS Teams, Skype, Zoom etc along with coaching on how to use them, to enable remote and team-working and virtual delivery of services when this is possible.

32. We need resources for supporting increased numbers of **formal and informal volunteering: expenses and equipment.**

33. Food banks and non-profit providers, and groups **distributing food and medication** require donations, storage facilities, help with collections and distribution, transportation. GM Poverty Action is collating information about food providers https://www.gmpovertyaction.org/coronavirus-and-gmpas-work/

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