

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 update covers information and issues which have been identified since 22nd March (see original paper).

VCSE LEADERSHIP STRUCTURES:

- VCSE Leadership Group is meeting weekly (Wednesday)
- Local infrastructure organisations are meeting weekly (Friday)
- VCSE Commissioning group (VCSE / public sectors) is meeting weekly (Friday)
- Funders Forum for independent funders being established by GMCVO and 10GM at request of National Lottery Community Fund – will meet asap

Information and issues arising from these meetings will be summarised in this paper.

KEY POINTS:

1. **Charities, voluntary and community groups and social enterprises are independent organisations.** Some charities are anticipating that they will be asked to redeploy their staff into the public sector – this would be extremely bad practice if it arose. Everyone will of course work closely together to address the current crisis, but our staff, volunteers and resources are needed where they are as we are already short of capacity.
2. **VCSE organisations were already stretched to the limit** (see <https://www.thinknpc.org/resource-hub/state-of-the-sector-2020/>) We welcome the flexibility being shown by commissioners and independent funders, but we also need additional funding and resources for both infrastructure and frontline.
3. **We recognise significant pre-existing inequalities within our own sector**, which reflect structural inequalities in the city region. We are especially concerned about community groups meeting the needs of BAME communities. They are the least well-resourced and most are not digitally connected, but carry out a vital function supporting and informing marginalised people. There is an urgent need to fund additional capacity and capacity-building to enable them to continue. Existing inequalities within population and VCSE sector: Smaller BAME community groups are not necessarily connected locally to local infrastructure, nor digitally. Some are closing down. Many are run by individuals who are self-employed or on zero hours

4. **The needs of social enterprises are not being understood or taken into account.** Government has confirmed that social enterprises that earn 'more than 50% of their income from trading' can access business support but this is totally inadequate: the loss of much smaller amounts of earned income can send organisations to the wall, and we need a much more flexible approach. Also small and new social enterprises typically start with a 'self-employed' social entrepreneur, who like other SMEs may not have drawn much income over the last three years; if they are unable to access job retention, they will be obliged to claim benefits and close the enterprise.

FURTHER ISSUES: OUR IMMEDIATE RESPONSE

5. Notes from VCSE Leadership Group meeting this week have been passed to national VCSE infrastructure (NCVO, acevo, National Voices, NAVCA and Equally Ours) by Ben Gilchrist.
6. VCSE Leadership Group, John Hannen and Anne Lythgoe are **working up a short 'key messages' paper** about the current needs of our sector in order to enable a response to the current humanitarian crisis.
7. GMCA and the GM Health and Social Care Partnership have **published a statement of support for the VCSE sector**. Almost all GM districts have also published some kind of similar statement and we understand all will shortly.
8. LIOs in some districts are leading on redeployment systems, community organising to support the shielded people identified by government, collection of donations for local good causes, collection of food and goods for people in need.

FURTHER ISSUES: VCSE SECTOR

9. Many VCSE organisations occupy premises owned by others. Landlords may be eligible for business rates relief – it needs to be a **condition of receiving business rates relief** that any savings are shared with tenants.
10. **Local government landlords** are urged to waive rent and rates payment for the duration of the crisis.

FURTHER ISSUES: PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES

11. Huge concerns arising about poor awareness from government and some local government of the **needs of BAME communities re for example lack of information in non-digital form and in minority languages**. Resources are being collated by GMBAME Network Chair to be published on the Network website.
12. Concern about **refugees and asylum seekers** with no recourse to public funds. What is the plan to support them? Note that the VCSE groups who support them are the least well-resourced even within the BAME sector.
13. **Places of worship** have now started to move services online (see 22nd March point 19 re independent churches). They are trying to support 'virtual' funerals. The new restrictions frustrate the cultural needs of some faith groups e.g. need to personally wash the body of a family member faith groups trying to create ways for this to be done virtually
14. Concern about **able-ism in the isolation and quarantine restrictions** – disabled people are much more affected by the restrictions and those who rely on personal care are less likely to be able to comply, therefore more at risk of contracting the virus.

15. **Shopping sessions are too early in the morning** for disabled people to get to them. It isn't clear how someone shopping on their behalf could identify themselves as 'legitimate'.
16. Breakthrough estimates **¾ of disabled people are not digitally connected**. Gaddum notes **neither are unwaged carers**, who are at high risk of becoming even more isolated.
17. **Access to work payments** are often used to pay for assistants not just equipment. There is no guidance about how / whether this should continue (cf 22nd March point 23 re personal assistants).
18. Citizen's Advice is reporting a **surge in demand re advice** on SSP and UC claims. They are expecting demand re debt, evictions/homelessness and repossessions to continue to grow for next 3 or 4 months.
19. Frontline organisations are very concerned at the **swift rise of demand for support around mental health, drug and alcohol use, domestic violence and self-harm** – and people think this will continue to rise after the crisis
20. **Advocacy services for people in care homes and psychiatric wards** are being discontinued due to health and safety concerns, leaving residents potentially vulnerable.