

Classification: Public

Key Decision: No

Gravesham Borough Council

Report to: Community and Leisure Cabinet Committee

Date: 15.09.20

Reporting officer: Kirsty Gaunt

Subject: Impact of Covid 19 on Gravesham's Community Sector - summary of local survey and how they are adapting.

Purpose and summary of report:

This report provides a summary of a recent survey conducted in partnership with North West Kent Council for Voluntary Services of local community organisations in Gravesend. Identifying how they have been impacted by Covid 19 and how they are adapting their services to meet changing needs.

Recommendations:

1. That the committee note and comment on the report.

1. Background

- 1.1 This report follows a survey of local community organisations at the end of June and beginning of July as lockdown measures were being relaxed and shielding was coming to an end.

2. Summary of survey on Impact of Covid 19 on Local community organisations

- 2.1 Local community organisations provide a range of services often to the most needy and vulnerable in our communities and historically have the ability to react and adapt quickly to meet local needs in times of crisis. From the start of lockdown the council has been in close contact with a number of local charities to develop specific covid-19 related services and to signpost clients contacting the council's helpline where appropriate.
- 2.2 An on-line survey provided the opportunity to engage with a larger number of local organisations to develop a more in depth understanding of how they have been impacted by the pandemic, emerging needs and the challenges ahead. This survey followed on from a countywide survey conducted by the Kent Community Foundation.
- 2.3 In total 22 responses were received from a range of community organisations, faith representatives and community groups.

- 2.4 All organisations had continued to operate throughout the lockdown and had been able to respond and adapt quickly to meet needs. This response is supported by the results of the Kent Community Foundation survey of organisations from across Kent that found 47% of respondents had experienced an increase in demand for their services with 21% seeing a reduction in demand. All respondents experienced an initial surge in demand for support with food, and as lockdown extended reported an increasing demand for mental health support.
- 2.5 All but one organisation that answered the question “has your organisation been financially impacted by the pandemic” replied that yes they had equating to 12 out of 20 organisations. 4 organisations reported that they had furloughed staff. 22 organisations had been able to access additional funding but not sufficient to cover losses in income and only enough to help in the short term.
- 2.6 When asked about changes in the types of support requested, loneliness and mental health support were the most reported responses followed by debt, benefits and help with finances. Other types of support where demand was increasing were employment, housing, relationships, support for carers and bereavement.
- 2.7 At the time the survey was completed, many organisations were looking forward to being able to physically re-open but were waiting on government guidance as to how this could be done safely. Most had positive experiences of delivering services and meetings virtually.

3. How services are adapting and how the council is supporting

- 3.1 All respondents had developed their online provision during lockdown with most providing services over the phone or virtually and the responses indicate that this has in the main worked well, with organisations planning to continue to adopt measures long term.
- 3.2 Flexible working practices have been successful for those organisations that have been able to work from home with plans to adopt permanently with the potential to make savings. Feedback from one organisation described how having to adapt to the lockdown has helped them be more prepared for future emergencies.
- 3.3 Virtual engagement has benefitted those activities that draw in participants from a large geographical area for example the Gravesham Town Twinning Association has been able to hold meetings with representatives from each of the twinning partners and there is broad consensus from all respondents to build this into their long term plans. Social media has been vital in getting messages out quickly.
- 3.4 Funding is clearly a significant concern for all respondents. Those with funding agreements in place did comment that they have found funders to be flexible and supportive. Although many respondents have been able to access emergency funding, for many this did not cover losses of income and was only short term. Those organisations that are constantly looking for and applying for funding advise that the usual funding streams have been diverted to the pandemic response so are concerned about their long term financial stability.
- 3.5 There has been a fantastic community response to the lockdown with a huge volunteering effort to support those in need. As some organisations suggested, there is the potential of tapping into this volunteering response to support volunteer recruitment for local organisations for example many charities need to

recruit volunteer drivers, befrienders etc., which volunteers have been providing throughout lockdown.

- 3.6 Those areas where support from the council would be welcome include, easy to access funding, office space and advice around interpreting and implementing Covid 19 guidance for re-opening.
- 3.7 Organisations commented on the good working between agencies since the start of the pandemic and were keen that this lasts.

4. Next steps

- 4.1 The council is keeping in regular contact with local services and expect needs and issues to evolve as more services open up, schools start the new academic year and people return to work after the summer break, so this survey will be followed up with regular telephone contact with community organisations.
- 4.2 The council has set up a community services networking meeting for the end of September and will provide an opportunity for information sharing and discussion. It is hoped that following this initial meeting they will become a regular occurrence and prove to be beneficial.
- 4.3 The council is working with North West Kent Volunteer Centre to develop a volunteer support programme, tapping into the surge in local volunteering to provide accredited training and developing and signposting local volunteering opportunities.
- 4.4 Following management team recommendations, a strategic review of current council funding to community organisations will be conducted.

IMPLICATIONS		APPENDIX 1
Legal	n/a	
Finance and Value for Money	n/a	
Risk Assessment	n/a	
Data Protection Impact Assessment	<i>A data protection impact assessment (DPIA) should be carried out at the start of any major project involving the use of personal data or if you are making a significant change to an existing process.</i>	
	a. Does the project/change being recommended through this paper involve the processing of personal data or special category data or criminal offence data ? A definition of each type of data can be found on the Information Commissioner's Office website via the above links.	
	b. If yes to question a, have you completed and attached a DPIA including Data Protection Officer advice?	
	c. If no to question b, please seek advice from your nominated DPIA assessor or the Information Governance Team at gdpr@medway.gov.uk .	
Equality Impact Assessment	a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to cause adverse impact or discriminate against different groups in the community? If yes, please explain answer. No	
	b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper make a positive contribution to promoting equality? If yes, please explain answer. No	
	<i>In submitting this report, the Chief Officer doing so is confirming that they have given due regard to the equality impacts of the decision being considered, as noted in the table above</i>	
Corporate Plan	# 2 Place	
Climate Change	Findings of report support virtual and remote ways of doing business	
Crime and Disorder	No implications	
Digital and website implications	We have been keep the website updated throughout the pandemic to provide accurate information and links to local services and support	
Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults	No implications	