

## **VS6 – Working together to build a stronger Liverpool City Region**

**To** LCR Recovery Groups

**Date** 20 May 2020

**Subject** **Contribution of the Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) Sector in the emergency response across the Liverpool City Region, and their involvement in recovery planning**

### **1. Objective**

This paper provides an overview of the involvement of VCFSE organisations in the emergency response to Covid-19 across Liverpool City Region, lists some of the emerging issues currently faced by the sector and makes a number of recommendations for consideration in the post-Covid-19 recovery planning.

### **2. The size and shape of the VCFSE sector in LCR**

Liverpool City Region is home to nearly 8,500 voluntary organisations, community groups and social enterprises working to tackle inequalities, and improve the lives of local people. The sector employs around 24,000 people in LCR. The sector is worth over £918m GVA to the region and generates £305m in inward investment from external trusts, funders and other sources (from outside the city region)

The 'sector' has a history that is focused on the place. Groups and organisations rooted in communities and neighbourhoods make up the majority of our sector. But across the LCR it is made up of a wide range of organisations, which may fall into one or more including:

- Small, community-led organisations with an annual turnover of less than £10k and are driven by the passion of volunteers and activists to help others (these make up ~80% of the sector)
- A range of specialist charity service providers, the majority of which rely on grant funding or are commissioned by public sector partners
- Trading charities and social enterprises, providing commissioned services and trading with other businesses and consumers but 'are not for profit'
- A network of CVS and other infrastructure organisations acting as 'anchors' in and for communities, neighbourhoods, localities and at a LCR level (although small in

number, these organisations play a key role in neighbourhoods and localities). Connected together through VS6, the LCR level partnership

- Some large, national charities with a local presence, concentrated in Liverpool.

Liverpool City Region is probably unique in the country in it has a long history and tradition of philanthropy and social action, with much of what we now know as part of public sector services having their roots in the City Region and the work of the sector many years ago.

### **3. The VCFSE sector role in the CV-19 crisis**

The VCFSE response to the Covid-19 emergency across LCR has been incredible in its strength, its depth and the speed at which it was been mobilised. VCFSE organisations of all sizes, as well as community volunteers, are offering their support and are integrating with emergency support structures at this time.

The sector has been quick to adapt at pace and with a huge degree of accuracy and efficacy to meet the needs of LCR communities. Early feedback shows that many VCFSE organisations have had to change the way that they work in the current crisis.

VCFSE organisations are:

**3.1. Providing frontline services** - Many VCFSE organisations have increased capacity in their services, working with the most vulnerable and isolated in our society and across the full breadth of our diverse communities in LCR. These include:

- Emergency food – This includes providing food banks, community kitchens, pantries and food supply. In addition to existing providers of this offer, many communities responded and mobilised to meet the increased demand. Feeding Liverpool has put food distribution system in place to ensure people in need across the City get access to food. Knowsley Kitchen, based on mutual aid is providing fresh produce from local suppliers and establishing a sustainable food network across the borough to respond to the Covid crisis and beyond
- Advice and advocacy – Including all forms of advice services (legal, housing, welfare, health, relationships, and employment) and advocacy for vulnerable people. For example, Citizens Advice across LCR have received LCR Cares funding to extend their helplines, provide more self-service online and social media tools.
- Physical tasks on behalf of people who cannot do something at the current time. This includes food and medicines collection. In many of the Boroughs and the City Centre the sector has mobilised to support this area of need. The CVS in LCR collectively recruited more than 5,000 volunteers who have been supporting good

neighbour and street champion roles. Sefton CVS has been the primary point of contact from Sefton Council call centre to support shielded and vulnerable people since the start of the crisis they have helped over 2,100 local people who needed help.

- Support with mental health – VCFSE organisations which provide services and activities which help tackle loneliness, social isolation, anxiety, and stress, across all ages have been especially busy. For example, Gallier House in Wirral have seen the demand for their services increase fourfold. They have been awarded funding, with CAW support, to change operations from Monday to Friday to 7 days a week.
- A modified offer to ensure access – many organisations and groups whilst not responding to the emergency food and transport requirements, acted quickly to adapt their services and activities to ensure their essential offer was not lost. This has been critical to maintaining key services

**3.2. Supporting people and communities in the most vulnerable situations.** VCFSE organisations have been especially key in providing this frontline support to people and groups in the most vulnerable situations, including:

- Communities of identity. Including VCFSE organisations working with people who are disabled and also those in black and minority ethnic communities (especially where their first language is not English), asylum seekers, Roma and gypsy communities, communities defined by age (older or young people)
- Communities of experience. Including homeless and rough sleepers, carers, people in sub-standard private rented accommodation, those released early from prison, victims of trafficking and exploitation, people with addictions
- People on low incomes. Especially those living on their own without contacts/networks and without internet access
- People not already in contact with public services. For example those at risk from domestic abuse, disabled people or young people not attending school, or those who have previously never been in touch with services, but are recently unemployed, experiencing loss of a business and are needing to access support for the first time.

**3.3. Supporting sector-wide collaboration, coordination and leadership.** VCFSE infrastructure organisations ( the CVS network, and others through VS6) have expanded and reorganised the scope of their work to support this frontline response by:

- 7 day coordination of the volunteer offer – recruitment, management and deployment of 1000s of volunteers e.g. integrated team to coordinate emergency helpline and response; triaging the Good Sam referral process
  - Particular food bank support including supporting the recruitment of additional volunteers, sourcing funds and supporting the supply of food)
  - Collecting and distributing donations across their place (both monetary and food and goods)
  - Handling and distributing recent grants to support food banks to top up their supplies and purchase fridges and freezers
- Funding - grant giving activity, mentor support for funding proposals and campaigning for resources for VCFSE, advocacy and lobbying with funders. In particular the VS6 work to support the Metro-Mayor to establish LCR Cares. The Community Foundation for Merseyside has led work with the Metro-Mayor office on the administration of LCR Cares funding which included National Emergencies Trust funds across the City Region.
- Communications to/with the VCFSE sector a range of support including the VS6 website and our monthly thematic based assemblies, which ensure at an LCR level we are hearing from front-line organisations connected to delivery to feed into the work of the CA.
- Data and insight gathering into new offer by, and situation of, VCFSE sector. VS6 are supporting this through the monthly assemblies
- Practical support to smaller VCFSE organisations
- Direct support for the ‘shielded’ cohort and people in vulnerable situations e.g. social prescribing link worker outreach and the provision of support such as shopping and prescription collection
- Providing leadership and strategic input to LCR’s CV-19 response structure, in particular through strengthened VCFSE leadership structures at district and LCR levels (inc. weekly meetings of the LCR VS6 Leadership Group, focused VCFSE Assembly meetings and weekly meetings with the Metro-Mayor). We are now moving into doing this for the recovery conversations
- Sector specific Advice, Information and Guidance to support organisations to navigate governance and safeguarding considerations in the rapidly changing context of Covid-19

#### **4. Volunteering in response to CV-19**

Interest in volunteering has spiked during this crisis, both in LCR and nationally. There are three main 'types' of volunteering happening:

- Formal, district-level arrangements have been set up in each of the 5/6 local authority areas. Local volunteering appeals are proving extremely popular. VS6 members (Halton & St Helens VCA, Liverpool CVS, Sefton CVS & Community Action Wirral) have set up volunteer registration arrangements for new volunteers in partnership with their local authorities. This acts as a brokerage system to best match people with volunteering opportunities and need. One Knowsley is working closely with their Local Authority to connect people into the Council run system. All have established good practice guidance and are offering support to newly established Mutual Aid and community run Good Neighbour schemes.
- Formal, national volunteering arrangements. A range of nationally-led volunteering agencies, structures and tools exist, including the new NHS Volunteer Responders scheme and the Red Cross Volunteers scheme.
- Good neighbour/mutual aid arrangements. Informal, local mutual aid groups are springing up all over LCR and the rest of the UK showing an incredible citizen and community response to the crisis. [Covid-19 Mutual Aid](#) has a list of local groups on its website, which is being added to regularly. VS6 members are reaching out to support new mutual aid groups, particularly with regard to assurance around social distancing, safeguarding, cash handling and other sensitivities.
- Volunteer involving organisations have created new volunteering roles and recruited new volunteers to support Covid-19 activities and response. Knowsley Kitchen has recruited 100 volunteers and St Helens Mind recruited 50 volunteers overnight to support their new check-in and chat service

## **5. Emerging issues for consideration in recovery planning**

VCFSE leaders have identified a number of risks and issues which are either inhibiting their capacity to work effectively as part of the emergency effort, or which threaten the effectiveness and sustainability of the sector's contribution to our communities in the medium to long term:

### **5.1. Operational:**

- 5.1.1. Capacity for managing and co-ordinating volunteering. Volunteering needs to be managed and co-ordinated so that volunteers don't endanger themselves, the most is made of people's efforts without duplication, vulnerable people are not placed at risk, and volunteers get the right support. Although as part of the emergency response all areas have risen to the challenge in normal times, this can prove difficult, particularly for infrastructure and anchor organisations, because:

- Not all areas have been resourced to provide a volunteer centre brokerage function run by a local CVS or infrastructure organisation. For the wider VCFSE sector austerity has seriously damaged VCFSE volunteer coordination capacity.
- A myriad of high profile national volunteering schemes that are now operating aren't as effectively integrated with locally led coordination as they could be despite local efforts to achieve this.
- There is an opportunity to fully utilize volunteering as part of a pathway into employment. As people experience unemployment or under-employment volunteering can be a key way of retaining skills, utilizing experience and building confidence as we recover.

5.1.2. A lack of resources can make data sharing and intelligence about VCFSE activities disconnected The size of the sector can make it difficult to co-ordinate all of the intelligence and data the sector collects or could collect. VCFSEs are not necessarily involved in statutory monitoring returns, and VCFSE leaders are having to instigate new ways of gathering vital data and intelligence with very little resource to do so. This affects the whole sector.

5.1.3. Insufficient access to PPE & EPE. Although registered providers in the VCFSE sector have the same access to PPE equipment and its disposal, as public sector staff. The wider sector is likely to need sustainable and safe ways to access supplies of PPE, how they use it and as we return to community buildings, access to EPE. Sharing and coordination processes (e.g. to share and jointly procure PPE) don't always include VCFSE organisations involved in frontline delivery. The sector will also require assistance and guidance about how they manage the risks and implications of returning to their place of work, and local information and data was identified as necessary

5.1.4. The new Track & Trace System as this is now rolled out locally, it's vitally important that the VCFSE sector plays a role in mobilising the sector response to track and trace.

5.1.5. Digital Exclusion alongside other colleagues, the VCFSE sector has identified the limited access to digital kit and equipment as a barrier for some parts of the LCR community to continue to get access to the support they needed.

## 5.2. Recovery planning:

5.2.1. Capacity to adapt. One of the VCFSE sector's strengths also presents a threat to its operation. As explained above, the sector has been quick to react, and prompt to get involved in front line support in communities alongside public sector partners. This has put great pressure on VCFSE organisations to adapt and develop at pace. Although many are coping with this demand, many front line charities and service providers are struggling with the transition towards digital

ways of working, or having to cease support for people where face to face is the only way to deliver services.

5.2.2. Responding whilst moving to Recovery many groups are still at the sharp end of the response efforts and are likely to continue to do that for a significant period of time. Alongside this there are a range of emerging issues that groups are being asked to support as a result of the lockdown and emergency. In addition, the VCFSE sector is being asked to enter recovery mode. For many organisations this will create a perfect storm and is likely to put the sustainability of the sector at risk.

5.2.3. A financial 'cliff edge' for the sector. VCFSEs are motivated by their social purpose and so are 'jumping in with both feet' rather than being cautious about, or protective of, their own financial position. The threat is particularly acute for small to medium sized charities and social enterprises, with different types of VCFSE organisations impacted differently and at different times. Many of them:

- Have seen big falls in their trading and fundraising income.
- Were already operating with low or very low levels of financial reserves. 75% of charities had less than 6 months reserves (from a sample of 417) and they employed 95% of the sector workforce
- Can't furlough staff because they're supporting the emergency response
- Are struggling with having to make multiple bids for emergency funding just to keep going
- Won't be able to access government financial support, which has been much less extensive than that available for the private sector (amounting to ~20% of the estimated income lost across the sector. Although there have been some changes to this, these are discretionary and often involve a competitive process
- Many organisations are involved in European and other programmes with a payment by results arrangement in place. This is a significant risk as the usual delivery methods are not available and many organisations could lose all of their income overnight, without funder and commissioner flexibility
- Reduction of business as usual funding opportunities was beginning to impact on the financial sustainability of the sector.

5.2.4. Increased demand. Frontline VCFSE organisations are very concerned at the swift rise in demand for support (e.g. financial and benefits advice, mental health, drug and alcohol use, domestic abuse and self-harm) and expect this to continue rising after the 'first wave' of the crisis passes. Advocacy services for people in care

homes and psychiatric wards are also being discontinued on health and safety grounds, leaving residents potentially vulnerable.

5.2.5. Inequalities within the sector. The VCFSE sector itself contains inequalities which often mirror wider societal inequalities - organisations supporting the most marginalised communities often started this crisis in the most precarious position. Many will have less resources, less IT capability and face higher levels of demand. It is important that these organisations are prioritised for support and are linked into the work of Community Hubs, not least as we learn more about the unequal impact of CV-19 itself.

## **6. Recommendations for the LCR recovery strategy**

Communities, faith groups, voluntary activity, local social enterprises and charities are key elements in the resilience of places. LCR needs to co-produce recovery, for that reason we think it is critical that there is a VCFSE sector strand to all recovery plans and strategies.

The VCFSE sector is facing extreme levels of risk and can be seen to be suffering. We know that for the immediate future, the current crisis will accelerate existing trends and stresses in the sector, and it is vitally important that we work through recovery to rebuild a sustainable and effectively functioning VCFSE sector.

The principles of recovery which have been adopted for LCR include the co-design of solutions with communities, development of partnerships and taking an asset based approach to developing solutions. The VCFSE sector provides a way to engage directly with the inequalities faced in our communities. It also provides a workforce to bring about change. Recovery planning from the Covid-19 crisis presents an opportunity to integrate planning for public and VCFSE systems, focus on 'early help' and build back better for communities.

Intervention will be needed to address inequality – VCFSE organisations are more likely to form in areas that are wealthy, have good shared spaces and/or existing social connections. For example Knowsley has the lowest number of charities per 1,000 population but a significant level of informal group activity. In the LCR, to grow and flourish, our sector will need support and networking opportunities, and an injection of resources. It's likely that we will need to work across sector and collaboration and co-operation will be key to a resilient VCFSE sector.

Therefore, our recommendations for **recovery planning** are:

**6.1. Involve local VCFSE leaders in a relevant and proportionate way in all recovery planning and governance arrangements.** The LCR arrangements that are currently being developed could be strengthened by:



- 6.1.1. Alongside the place at the City Region Recovery Panel for a VS6 member, we think a further representative would ensure the full range of the sector is connected in. This could helpfully come from the Fairness & Social Justice Advisory Board *A strong voice in the co-ordination of the LCR recovery strategy will enable clarity at the top level of planning.*
- 6.1.2. Reviewing the LRF structures to ensure relevant and proportionate VCFSE involvement, which links up to the national VCS Emergency Committee and into LCR districts via the local VCFSE sector. *Meaningful involvement of VCFSE leaders in LRF structures at a LCR level will create collaborative partnerships to build on in each district.*
- 6.1.3. Designating a Lead Member and officer/team at a LCR level and in each borough to work closely with the VCFSE sector on recovery over the coming months. *Having a clear point of contact will help build relationships at a LCR and locality level through the living with Covid-19 and build back better phases of recovery.*
- 6.2. Engage with the sector and with communities through existing VCFSE sector networks and representative bodies.** Moving forwards and into the recovery planning, VCFSE active involvement will be key if LCR is able to bring society and the economy back together and address the emerging priorities of tackling inequalities, building confidence, behavior change, and co-design of a resilient city region. This includes:
- 6.2.1. Connecting with existing representative bodies such as the VS6 and the Social Economy Panel and relevant others whom can play a key role in co-producing the recovery strategy. *Each of these bodies involve ‘experts’ in their field – chief executives, senior managers, health professionals, lawyers, strategists, and front-line staff*
- 6.2.2. Instigate two-way communications lines and channel resources into VCFSE organisations which represent marginalised communities, *to make sure that they are strongly linked into the development of community hubs, community support networks and recovery approaches.*
- 6.2.3. Take up the offer with the VCFSE sector to gather intelligence and insight, collate wider community feedback, hear from critical voices within different communities, escalate priority issues, and take action on these issues. *Use this shared work to reform the system response to better respond to inequality and the demonstrable disadvantage in our communities that is so visible at this time.*
- 6.3. Ensure VCFSE services and support offers are embedded in the CV-19 response through the living with Covid and build back better periods.** The public sector has had to rapidly stand up emergency structures to support vulnerable groups and this speed has often meant ‘building the car while driving it’. However, as we move into the

next phase of 'living with CV-19' the VCFSE sector role will be even more crucial. This means:

- 6.3.1. Developing co-ordinated pathways of emergency and ongoing support which reach into VCFSE services. VCFSE organisations can become part of local authority operational models and the 'mainstream' delivery in a place, including any future developments of the community hub model. *These should link up with local delivery systems and involve building a 'matrix' of support which includes the VCFSE sector.*
- 6.3.2. Commissioning local VCFSE organisations (or extending existing arrangements) to provide additional formal and informal emotional and practical support for communities.
- 6.3.3. Where possible, prioritising purchasing from LCR social enterprises and the trading arms of local charities and identify market gaps for developing this part of the VCFSE sector to strengthen local spending and its benefits. *There is a rich range of LCR work and expertise on community wealth building to tap into and strengthen further. Value the local and social impact that buying from the VCFSE sector brings to economy and society.*
- 6.3.4. Making the most of clinical, strategic and frontline experts from the VCFSE sector. *For example, this could include redeployment into mainstream services.*

Recommendations for **strengthening support for a resilient VCFSE sector** in the future include:

**6.4. Work with VCFSE leaders across LCR to describe a sustainable VCFSE 'ecosystem' which outlasts the current emergency.**

- 6.4.1. Support VCFSE Leaders to drive forward large-scale workforce and organisational development work within VCFSE organisations – *This will ensure the VCFSE can transform its offer and adapt in a highly volatile period of change for the country and be able to respond for the benefit of their beneficiaries.*
- 6.4.2. Work with existing providers of VCFSE infrastructure support to bring together mutual aid groups, existing voluntary organisations and community groups, social enterprises and the statutory organisations in a place. *This will enable us together to deal with the issues not yet as visible but just as critical – mental trauma and ill health; exacerbated poverty gap and the effects of this for individuals and families; social disconnection through isolation; community cohesion and tensions; lack of bridging social capital capabilities in certain neighbourhoods and communities of identity.*

6.4.3. Encourage shared VCFSE and public sector leadership and partnerships – *This will enable the sector to take a strong role in work around responding to economic challenges, tackling inequalities and coordination on service demand pressures.*

**6.5. Support the strengthening of volunteer management and coordination capacity, including:**

6.5.1. Identifying and allocating resources for this, working through the leadership of local volunteer centres, CVS's and local infrastructure organisations. *This would mean there is support to transform spontaneous offers of help into parts of the VCFSE sector offer, by creating new connections and providing practical help to keep individuals and groups going. This will require an increased and more consistent pattern of funding across the whole of LCR, awarded to CVS-type organisations who can lead volunteering coordination and management.*

6.5.2. Advocating for locally led coordination of volunteering, whilst ensuring strong linkages into nationally prescribed infrastructure through the development of partnerships with the British Red Cross, for example. *A resilience volunteering infrastructure will rely on the development of partnerships across sectors and geographies, on the ability to create space for peaks in demand and on shared ownership in decision-making.*

6.5.3. Exploring the development of LCR level volunteering promotion. LCR CA should work with VCFSE leaders to build on the work that has been undertaken by resourcing a feasibility study for a LCR approach to promote integrated volunteering. *This would be a platform connecting into, and strengthening, existing locality arrangements led by local infrastructure organisations, creating a clearer LCR 'front door' for potential volunteers complementing local 'front door' approaches. If this is feasible, secure the funding needed to co-produce this work with VCFSE, public and private sector partners.*

**6.6. Use the voice and reach of the public sector to give a platform for the VCFSE sector's successes and concerns.**

6.6.1. Amplifying positive messages coming from the VCFSE sector about its work at the current time. *This includes offering support, congratulation and celebration of all that is being achieved, for example through social media channels and public statements.*

6.6.2. Supporting calls for further national government financial support for the sector. *LCR should lend its voice to national calls for increased funding for the charity and voluntary sector and enable more joint lobbying by public sector and VCFSE sector leaders for the interdependent resources that we all require e.g. through core cities and LGA platforms.*

**6.7.LCR public sector organisations should support the financial and business security of the sector both directly and indirectly.** The VCFSE sector recognises that local public bodies are facing severe financial and business continuity challenges themselves, but there are actions they could take to support the VCFSE sector at this time. These include:

- 6.7.1. Implementing the promised freedoms and flexibilities around public contracts. *Almost every public body in LCR has published a statement promising flexibility around VCFSE grant and programmatic funding, including things like flexibility on delivery requirements, prompt payment, support with cash-flow, and a relaxation of monitoring requirements. There needs to be assurance that these pledges are being consistently implemented and fully adopted across the LCR*
- 6.7.2. Using their influence and networks to ensure additional funding coming into LCR is fairly distributed across the city-region and can be accessed where most needed. *This means new and additional funding continues to be channeled directly into the many community groups, charities, voluntary organisations, social enterprises and co-operatives which are a key part of the emergency effort in LCR, for at least the next 6 months.*
- 6.7.3. Supporting the VCFSE sector in LCR to secure funding through new forms of fundraising, through appeals and attracting new grants and investments. *Crowd funding, public campaigns and appeals are becoming vitally important as money is directed away from individual organisations and into issue-based fundraising.*
- 6.7.4. Supporting the business continuity and resilience of VCFSE organisations recognising particularly where there are demand pressures. *Beyond funding, explore other actions that can help VCFSEs (e.g. rent holidays, digital infrastructure and IG support, workforce strategy and training support, donating equipment and seconding staff).*
- 6.7.5. Enabling or funding the emergency infrastructure required for smaller front-line community organisations to bid for funding – *Local authorities have a role to play in supporting the infrastructure organisations which enable front line organisations to bid for funding, develop new ways of working and more sustainable business models. For example through an extended network of VS6, bid writers, passporting information between funders, re-funding projects and enabling support with monitoring and evaluation. The National Lottery Communities Fund has also indicated that it can now fund this sort of support at the current time.*
- 6.7.6. Include VCFSE employees, carers and volunteers in workforce support initiatives. *For example, professional emotional and mental health counselling.*

6.7.7. Consistently, but proportionately, include VCFSE activities in data collection and operational returns and recognise the need to resource and support this work. *This will build intelligence and understanding of the sector's activities, enable better co-production of solutions and increase accountability.*

## 7. Conclusions:

We agree that the only way forward is to Build Back Better, keeping hold of some of the best bits of our current situation, particularly the way communities have mobilised, a fairer approach and more flexibility in the way we work. We look forward to helping to create the Metro-Mayor's vision of a "new economic model" with communities at the heart of it.

We want to see to a fairer and more equal City Region and society and will work alongside colleagues to support the achievement of this. A resourced and resilient VCFSE sector has a key role to play in making life kinder, fairer and more equal as it has done in the Liverpool City Region for hundreds of years.

## 8. Contacts:

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