

NE and North Cumbria VCSE Sector COVID -19 Survey April 2020

Results for Northumberland VCSE

86 people responded in total to the survey, however as not all questions were relevant or able to be responded to by all, the number of individual responses to questions did vary. All organisations responding were based in Northumberland and operate mainly in the county but some also operated in neighbouring authorities as well.

A wide range of organisations responded to the survey. Of 50 respondents, the main areas were 19 health and well-being, 15 community development, 14 ageing and supporting older people, 10 arts, culture and heritage, 9 advice/advocacy/benefits, 9 rural and 8 sports and recreation. The main groups of people supported were 27 organisations open to a cross-section of people, 12 older people, 8 young people, 7 disabled, 7 long term health conditions, 7 children.

Summary of key findings

Impact on Income

- 57% stated that their approximate yearly income was under £50,000
- Loss of income for April – June 2020 was wide ranging from 0% to over 75% with earned income being most affected followed by fundraising income.
- Over £1.5 million of COVID-19 funding had been obtained.
- The amount of reserves varied with 11% no reserves and 20% over 12 months of reserves.
- Only 6% considered they were likely to close as a result of COVID-19 and 36% were unsure.

Impact on Organisation and Priorities

- Boards were viewed as largely supportive during the crisis.
- 48% of organisations were no longer able to operate at all as a result of social distancing.
- The impact of financial constraints on ability to deliver service varied across organisations.
- Positive outcomes for organisations were new and stronger relationships and partnership working.
- Supporting volunteers and staff in terms of health and well-being and morale was considered the highest priority for organisations and was a priority in terms of home working and remote delivery.
- Strategic planning in the short, medium and long term was highest priority for organisation support.

- Communications and marketing were given the highest priority for services and beneficiaries.
- Liaison with funders and commissioners and funding advice – applying for grants were priorities for funding and income.

Impact on Staff and Volunteers

- 65% had under 10% not working and 16% had over 75% not working.
- 55% had furloughed staff and 78% of these organisations were paying staff the additional 20% on top of 80% reimbursable government allocation.
- 18% expected staff losses expecting to lose between 20% and 40% of their staff and 42% were unsure.
- 98% of respondents had volunteers in their organisations and those that could currently be supported varied.
- 22% had recruited new volunteers to assist the service since lockdown, the numbers ranging from 1 to 150 volunteers.

Impact on Service users/beneficiaries

- The number of service users varied considerably with well over a third having between 100 and 500 beneficiaries and a couple of respondents having more than 25,000 users.
- 64% stated that over 50% of service users would not have their needs met and of these 44% stated over 75% would not have their needs met due to financial or social distancing measures.
- 65% were able to reconfigure their services providing phone and online services. The percentage of service users making use of these services was variable.
- Main reasons for service users not accessing services was lack of digital know how and not having access to the tools in terms of beneficiaries and staff/volunteers. These were also the reasons for not reconfiguring services
- The main other ways services had been configured were use of social media, texts and providing information on the website and online meetings.
- Concerns about unmet need was raised for a whole range of people e.g. learning disabled, poor mental health, lonely and isolated, young people. Concerns were expressed about the lack of social interaction and the educational/social/ financial and emotional well- being of people.

Funders and Commissioners Response

- 78% and 64% respectively stated that response from funders and commissioners was very good/good.

Impact on Partnership Working

- 72% were working with partners and 65% were aware of the local COVID-19 Shielding Hubs or Support Hubs established through local authorities and how to refer to them.
- 51% thought that the Shielding/Support hubs were aware of the needs of their beneficiaries/target groups and responding to them.
- 46% were making referrals into Local Authority Support Hubs, Mutual Aid Support Group and NHS Volunteer Responders.
- 36% were receiving referrals to support local people at risk of COVID-19 from health and social care or local authority staff involved in managing COVID-19 response locally.

Support for the recovery

- The main responses related to funding – long term core funding, flexible funding, widening scope of grants and honesty from funders how likely to be funded and funding stability

Results

Impact on Income

Income

- 57% (42) of 74 respondents stated that their approximate yearly income was under £50,000. Only three organisations had income over £500,000. 18% (13) respondents had income between £100,000 and £250,000.

Percentage loss of income anticipated April – June 2020

- The percentage loss of income was wide ranging between 0% and over 75%. Between 15% and 20% of 74 respondents stating in each category 0% - 10%, 10% - 25%, 25% -50%, 50% - 75% and over 75%.

Main sources of income currently being affected in rank order

- Earned income was most affected followed by fundraising income and then grant income and contract income. Investment income was lowest priority. Numbers responding was however variable.

COVID-19 related funding

- 51% (38) of 74 respondents had applied for COVID-19 funding. 59% (22) of 37 responding had received COVID-19 related funding.
- Main reasons for not applying for funding were not meeting criteria of funding opportunities available (20), needing funding for ongoing core costs not

COVID- related activities (14) and not needing funding at the moment (10). 8 respondents were not aware of opportunities and 5 lacked staff capacity.

- Of 21 respondents overall over £1.5 million of funding had been obtained with eleven organisations receiving over 100k

Months of core running costs held in reserve

- Whilst 11% (7) of 65 respondents had no reserves, 20% (13) had over 12 months reserves. 17% (11) had only 0-3 months reserves and 25% (16) had 3 – 6 months reserves.

Likely closure as a result of COVID – 19

- Of 69 respondents only 6% (4) considered they were likely to close and a further 36% (25) were unsure.

Impact on Organisation and Priorities

Rating of Board capacity and engagement during the crisis

- Of 69 respondents, 68% (47%) rated their Board as very good/good and only 4% (3) rated as poor.

Impact of social distancing on ability to provide service

- Of 50 respondents as a result of social distancing, 48% (24) had not been able to operate at all and for a further 36% (18) it had significantly reduced. For only 4%(2) it had not reduced at all.

The extent to which financial constraints have impacted on your ability to deliver services

- 26% (13) stated that financial constraints had a significant impact on their ability to deliver services and the same percentage stated no impact yet but likely in the next 3 months. 28% (14) stated no impact yet and were confident it would not be in the next 3 months. A further 20% (10) stated some impact. 50 responded to this question.
- The main reasons why services have reduced/halted are risks to staff/volunteers/users in delivering front facing services (33), unable to reconfigure services and deliver them in the same way (16) staff capacity reduced due to self isolating/impact of COVID-19 and demand reduced/ disappeared due to COVID-19 impact (14). 50 responded to the question and were able to give more than one response.

Positive outcomes for your organisation

- The main responses in relation to positive outcomes were new and stronger relationships and partnership working, new and stronger networks and new volunteers.

Priorities for your organisation in rank order

- Supporting volunteers and staff in terms of health and well being and morale was considered the highest priority followed by safeguarding staff, volunteers and beneficiaries. Coping with reduced staff and volunteer was next followed by HR support including furloughing of staff, recruiting additional volunteers and getting PPE for staff and volunteers. 60 responded to this question

Priorities home working and remote delivery in rank order

- Supporting volunteers and staff health and well being and morale was highest priority closely followed by safeguarding staff, volunteers and beneficiaries. This was followed by redesigning the delivery of core services using digital. Of less of a priority were homeworking – policies, systems, arrangements, risk assessments, homeworking - software, digital and communication skills, software, digital/tech support for beneficiaries and lastly homeworking – IT/telephone kit for staff and volunteers.

Priorities for organisation support in rank order

- Strategic planning in the short, medium and long term was highest priority closely followed by contingency planning and risk management and financial planning and management – cash flows, reducing costs, new liabilities. Lesser priority was given to governance support and supporting trustees, legal support and considering partnerships and mergers. 60 responded to this question.

Priorities staff and volunteers in rank order

- Supporting staff and volunteers, health and well-being and morale was the highest priority closely followed by safeguarding-staff, volunteers and beneficiaries. Coping with reduced staff and volunteer capacity was next followed by recruiting additional staff to meet demand. Lowest priority was given to HR support including on furloughing staff. 50 responded to this question.

Priorities services and beneficiaries in rank order

- Communications and marketing were given the highest priority, closely followed by redesigning the delivery of core services – other and then redesigning the delivery of core services – digital. Lesser priority was given

equally to software/digital/tech support for beneficiaries and coping with reduced staff and volunteer capacity. 55 responded to this question

Priorities funding and income in rank order

- Whilst in rank order the following were all fairly close in terms of priority, liaison with funders and commissioners, funding advice – applying for grants, developing new income streams and fundraising advice and support. Least priority was given to social investment advice and advice on job retention scheme.

Impact on Staff and Volunteers

Paid Staff

- 60% (33) of 55 respondents had paid staff. Of those with paid staff they had on average had 5 full time and 4 part time staff. However, 18 had less than 5 full time staff and 22 had less than 5 part time staff

Percentage of staff not working due to direct COVID-19 impact

- Of 31 respondents 65% (20) had under 10% not working. 16% (5) had over 75% not working.

Furloughing of staff

- 55% (18) of 33 respondents had furloughed staff. Six respondents had furloughed between 50% and 75% of their staff and five respondents 25% - 50%. A further 4 respondents had furloughed over 75% of their staff.
- The main reasons for furloughing staff were unable to deliver the service due to COVID-19 (14), core organisation income at risk (9), no current demand for service due to COVID-19 (7) and project funding/contract income no longer available as project/contract paused (6).
- 78% (14) of the 18 respondents were paying staff the additional 20% on top of 80% reimbursable government allocation.

Will loss of income lead to staff losses in the next 6 -12 months

- Of 33 respondents 18% (6) expected staff losses and 42% (14) were unsure. Those expecting staff losses expected to lose between 20% and 40% of their staff.

Volunteers

- 98% (54) of 55 respondents stated that their organisation had volunteers.

- The proportion of volunteers that organisations could no longer support due to COVID-19 ranged from over 75% for 18 organisations, 0-25% for 10 organisations and 50% -75% for 9 organisations. Only 44 responded to this question.
- 22% (12) of 54 respondents had managed to successfully recruit new volunteers to support the service since lockdown started.
- Reasons for not recruiting new volunteers included not required stated by 32 of 42 respondents. Other reasons were lack of capacity to find, train and support them stated by 3 respondents and lack of interest from new volunteers (2).
- New volunteers recruited ranged from 1 per organisation to 150, eight organisations recruited 5 or less and six recruited between 20 and 80 new volunteers.

Impact on Service users/beneficiaries

Service users/beneficiaries annually

- 38% (19) respondents had between 100 and 500 users, 18% (9) had between 500 and 1000 users and a further 22% (11) had between 1000 and 5000 users. 5 respondents had up to 100 users and 2 respondents had over 25,000 users on an annual basis. 50 responded the question

Service users/beneficiaries needs unmet due to financial or social distancing impact of COVID-19

- 44% (22) stated that over 75% would not have their needs met and a further 20% (10) stated 50%-75%. 8% (4) stated none and a further 8% (4) did not know. 50 responded to this question

Able to reconfigure face to face services offering phone and online support

- For 13 of the 50 respondents this was not applicable to their service. For the 37 able to respond 65% (24) were able to reconfigure their services and 35% (13) were unable to do so.

Approximate percentage of user/beneficiaries accessing services via phone/online

- Of the 24 respondents there were 42% (10) where over 75% were accessing services via phone/online, a further 25% (6) where 25% -50% were accessing and 17% (4) where 50% - 75% were accessing.

Main reasons for not accessing services by phone/online

- Of 20 respondents the main reasons for not accessing services were lack of digital know how and access to tools – beneficiaries (11) and lack of digital know how and access to tools – staff/volunteers (9) Other reasons included lack of appetite from beneficiaries (3), lack of access to phone and online and costs.

Main reasons for not configuring your face to face services to phone/online

- The main reasons for not configuring face to face to phone/ online were lack of staff/ volunteer resource (7) lack of digital know how and access to tools - beneficiaries (6) lack of digital know how and access to tools – staff/volunteers (4) and lack of appetite from beneficiaries (3). 44 responded to the question in total and other responses largely related to not being possible or appropriate given the nature of their service.

How else reconfigured your services/support you offer in response to COVID-19

- The main other ways the service has been configured has been use of social media, texts and providing information on the website and online meetings. Other activities include shopping/food deliveries and activity packs, increasing volunteer coordination, redesigning of courses, re-evaluating business plan, providing online counselling and working more with partners. 39 responded to the question.

Concerns about unmet needs for certain groups

- Respondents were asked who and what needs were not being met. Respondents had concerns for a whole range of people including those with a learning disability, older people, young people, the vulnerable and isolated, users, those with no internet access, carers, those with poor mental health, disabled, older volunteers etc. Concerns were expressed about the lack of social interaction and not able to hold group events, provision of activities including art and culture, the educational/social/ financial and emotional well-being of people, loneliness and isolation and impact on mental health. 34 responded to the question.

Funders and Commissioners Response

How well funders responded to being flexible about project outputs/outcomes and timescales in relation to COVID-19

- Of 31 respondents, 52% (16) stated that the response from funders was very good and a further 26% (8) stated it was good. The rest 23% (7) stated neither good nor bad. Positive comments were made about the support from the Community Foundation, National Lottery and Northumberland County Council.

How well have commissioners responded to being flexible about project outputs/outcomes and timescales in relation to COVID-19

- Of 23 respondents 52% (12) stated that the response from commissioners was very good and a further 22% (5) stated good. The rest 26% (6) stated neither good nor bad.

Impact on Partnership Working

Collaborating/working in partnership with local authorities and other partners to support the local response to COVID-19

- Of 46 respondents 72% (33) were working with partners and 28% (13) were not.
- 65% (30) were aware of the local COVID-19 Shielding Hubs or Support Hubs established through local authorities and how to refer to them and 35% (16) were not.
- Of 35 respondents 51% (18) thought that the Shielding/Support hubs were aware of the needs of their beneficiaries/target groups and responding to them. 6% (2) considered they were not aware and a further 43% (15) did not know.
- Of 46 respondents, 21 were making referrals into Local Authority Support Hubs, 16 to Mutual Aid Support Group and 10 to NHS Volunteer Responders. 20 were not referring into any of these groups. The main reasons for not doing so were that it was not applicable or appropriate and providing support within their own organisation.
- 36% (13) of 36 respondents were receiving referrals to support local people at risk of COVID-19 from health and social care or local authority staff involved in managing COVID-19 response locally. 56% (20) had not received referral and a further 8% (3) did not know. Of these receiving referrals 12 were able to manage the demand and one was not.

Support for the recovery

How the recovery process could best be supported by funders, VCSE support organisations and statutory bodies

- There were 36 responses, the main responses related to funding – long term core funding, flexible funding, widening scope of grants and honesty from funders how likely to be funded, funding stability. Another key response was

related to partnership working identifying gaps and demands. Provision of advice including factsheets, newsletters and online tutorial and Q and A workshops were also stated. Also mentioned was strong VCS infrastructure to ensure good governance, stronger links with statutory bodies to ensure communities better organised to support future crisis. Also ensure proper handling of personal data provided to volunteer support group to protect volunteers.