

Research Summary – One Manchester: COVID-19 Recovery

Version 3

Anton Schultz: 06/07/2020

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Introduction and Context

In early May 2020, One Manchester agreed a new work strand within its COVID response structure: To *“Develop and implement a plan to support local communities and organisations during and beyond the COVID-19 crisis. Continue to develop partnerships at place, city and GM levels that create resilient, thriving communities.”*

The following priorities were identified to inform the focus of a community investment fund on the basis of issues already identified through the early stages of our customer welfare calls to approximately 1000 of our most vulnerable tenants.

1. **Food** – ensuring residents have access to safe and sustainable supply of food will be our focus in the short and medium term and will take priority over all else
2. **Financial resilience** – supporting local provision that assists our customers, particularly organisations that provide referral routes for clients accessing our employment support and One Money services.
3. **Social isolation and wellbeing** – ensuring residents have access to a friendly ear to support them and opportunities for meaningful contact and activity that promote good mental health during the COVID crisis (within constraints of social distancing and self isolation).

Research Approach

In order to help us best target resources, a range of activities have since been undertaken to develop our insight and understanding, and identify how we will utilise our resources:

- Review of other impact studies and discussion notes including
 - LGIU impact on small charities report (26.04.20)
 - Voluntary Sector Assembly Write up (08.04.20)
 - Young Manchester – Risks and Challenges During COVID-19 (08.04.20)
 - SEUK report - Social Enterprise and COVID-19
- In depth discussions with MACC regarding consultation with the sector in relation to COVID-19 response and funding support.
- Discussions with other Greater Manchester Housing Partnership providers on approaches to community investment in response to COVID-19.
- Primary research with local community hubs and mutual aid groups (in depth interviews)
- Primary research with food projects including food banks, and clubs (primarily desk research).

Secondary Research

The review of the above documents identified a range of issues. The LGIU states “The crisis is likely to have a long-term impact on the charitable sector. Some small charities will not survive (and there may also be some large, high profile casualties). Some charities will be forced to rethink their purpose and objectives”. They suggest that local authorities and other agencies should consider how they can support and work with small charities as part of their response and recovery plans.

Other local research provides supporting evidence of the need for support for food, financial resilience, and mitigating social isolation and loneliness. Furthermore, a range of risks to the sustainability of organisations already active in these areas prior to COVID are apparent.

Primary Research - Approach

Community Hubs

Structured interviews were completed with 25 community organisations and community hubs known to be operating centre based provision relevant to our priorities in our neighbourhoods before COVID-19 (see Appendix 1).

All interviews were conducted during May and June 2020.

Desktop research was undertaken on several other organisations who we were unable to undertake an in depth interview with. See Appendix 1 for details.

Interview questions were grouped into the following sections and used as the basis for exploratory conversations:

- Current service provision
- Staffing and Volunteers
- Insight – Unmet Community Needs / Service Demand
- Partnerships
- Funding and sustainability
- Support needs

Mutual Aid Response

Several mutual aid groups were identified as potentially being active within One Manchester's primary area of operation.

1. Compstall Avenue M14
2. Fallowfield vs Coronavirus *
3. Gorton/Abbey Hey Covid-19 Mutual Aid Group
4. Hulme & Mosside Neighbourhood Forum *
5. Levy Corona Helpers *
6. Ardwick and Longsight Covid Mutual Aid Group *
7. Rusholme Coronavirus Support
8. Whalley Range COVID-19 mutual support group

Attempts were made to contact and speak with all of the above. Interviews were conducted with people involved from 4 of these (indicated by asterisk above).

Interview questions were grouped into the following sections and used as the basis for exploratory conversations:

- Information about the group, and how it was formed
- Current service provision and demand
- Partnerships
- Funding and Resourcing
- Approaches to Managing risk (health and safety)
- Support needs
- Aspirations for continuation and development

Food Projects

Remote research was undertaken to look more specifically at the status of community food projects known to be in existence before the impact of COVID-19. This involved identifying food projects known to be operating within One Manchester's primary area of operation (See Appendix 2). This drew significantly on Greater Manchester Poverty Action's map of support services¹. The nature of the usual offer was identified from online research, as well as knowledge of One Manchester staff. The current status of the offer was assessed during the period 26.06.20 to 01.07.20. The current status was identified using a combination of online research looking at websites, as well as phone calls.

¹ <https://www.gmpovertyaction.org/maps/>

NB: Projects related to the specific location of a distribution point and not the organisation, some organisations account for several projects, and there is some overlap with the community hub research.

Primary Research Findings

Community Hubs

Impact on Services

The hubs interviewed generally provide and host a wide range of services that contribute to the health and wellbeing for the communities they serve. They provide opportunities for social interaction, and accessing support services for some of the most vulnerable.

Usual Services

Of the 25 organisations interviewed 13 organisations reported ceasing their usual services completely. Services ceased included:

- Community Grocers (membership based food clubs for financially vulnerable)
- Sports, culture and leisure activities
- Room hire and community events
- Community meals
- Training and education
- Employment support
- Childminding

Adapted Services

Many have adapted services, finding new ways to maintain support and engagement with their communities. In most cases this has involved making use of technology. However, issues with access to IT and wireless, as well as skills and capacity issues means this has only been partially effective with some groups, particularly elderly, but also some specific issues in BAME communities.

Examples of service adaptation included:

- Maintaining youth work and mentoring services via online sessions using Zoom and other social media (e.g. Youth on Solid Ground, Manchester Settlement).
- Online homework clubs, supporting people remotely with home-schooling (e.g. GIFT Academy)

New Service and Responses

Many of the hubs have mobilised and adapted to establish or support other local services

At least 10 of the hubs spoken to were involved in supporting the community food response including preparation, purchasing, packing and distribution of food to most vulnerable.

At least 4 hubs have established new telephone based befriending or welfare schemes to maintain contact and reduce social isolation.

Other innovative new responses included:

- Distribution of activity and educational support packs, for both young and old to help combat boredom and support remote / home learning
- Doorstep welfare check ins, particularly for those without access to digital services
- New online educational support (homework clubs) and storytelling.
- Delivery of other non-food welfare items (hygiene, medicines, sports and exercise equipment)
- Establishing and supporting new virtual social activities
- An online counselling services making use of students
- New community radio information services to promote local support and issues.
- Printing of homework and educational resources for collection or delivery to support families without IT at home.
- Establishing a temporary night shelter for homeless people
- Support to complete online forms and applications remotely

These responses illustrate the important role that these community hubs play in terms of community resilience.

Some have made use of relationships with local businesses to support their responses, e.g. Wai Yin Centre working with Yang Sing as part of the food response.

Staffing

15 of 25 community hubs interviewed informed us they had furloughed staff, in some cases ranging from just one, to nearly 30. In most cases this was a significant proportion of staff

For those organisations that require staff to support hospitality and room hire, there is significant uncertainty about if / when these staff will be able to return.

4 of 8 organisations that answered said that redundancies were likely, and in some cases probably going to be significant.

Organisations working with volunteers identified a range of impacts. Some have services that were dependent on elderly volunteers to support community shops and cafes, and the risks of them returning to volunteer in the short term presents an ongoing challenge.

Funding / Income

Trading income from room hire, cafes / food, private childcare, hospitality are particularly badly affected, which is the primary income source for some of the community hubs. In several cases, trading income stopped completely. For these organisations, financial recovery is unclear, and likely to have a significant and lasting impact. 5 organisations mentioned (without specific prompt) that reserves were significantly depleted.

Organisations more reliant on grant appear less affected in the short term, with most funders allowing flexibility to support organisations to cope and adapt.

Whilst several organisations had support with emergency responses from COVID-19 specific grants, others expressed concern about other longer term grants that have been put on hold or delayed which may have longer term impacts on plans.

14 of the 25 organisations interviewed indicated significant concern in terms of the financial impact of the current crisis on their sustainability. Several of them were very concerned, recognising that their loss of income and trading income could take a very long time to recover. At least two organisations mentioned unprompted concern over their ability to pay their rent in the next two months.

Insight into community issues

Community hubs have observed a number of issues emerging within the communities they operate:

- Demand for welfare support (primarily food) increased significantly. Food clubs have been missed where they have been stopped, adding to financial strain for many
- Some issues noted in terms of weight loss and poor nutrition.
- Loneliness and Isolation is a significant issue (increasingly so)
- Rise in poor health generally, physical and mental. Mental Health is a big issue, longer the lockdown goes, those already suffering from issues are getting worse and worse.
- Anxiety issues in relation to benefits and looming financial pressures.
- Digital inclusion is a big issue, with many lacking access to devices, wireless networks, and others lacking skills and confidence to access services adapted for online. Increased need for people to print scan and email documents which many don't know how to do.
- Some increase in domestic tensions, sometimes resulting in domestic violence, demonstrated in some increase in moves to safety service.
- Home schooling is likely to lead to increasing educational inequalities, with some families struggling to support home learning for range of reasons. E.g. parents capacity and ability to help, access to IT and resources at home, home learning environment. Educational support for BAME children highlighted as an area of need. Particularly where English is second language for parents.
- Increase of litter in public spaces
- Some families having particularly difficult time notably carers of children with Special Educational Needs.

- Language barriers have meant that some people have not received or acted on advice on how to isolate and access support.

Emerging Responses

In response, some hubs would like to be able to do more to respond or adapt, including

- Increasing capacity to support welfare response (e.g. improved facilities and equipment to support safe production and distribution of food and welfare support)
- Increasing access to IT devices and software for clients, and support to access wifi. Adapting from static IT facilities to more agile / mobile community facilities with mobile devices.
- Increasing outreach work to isolated people, including isolated young BAME people and elderly.
- Increasing access to counselling support.

Organisational Support Requirements

Community hubs face a range of challenges:

- Reduced trading income
- Reduced volunteering and staff capacity
- Increased social need in community
- Reduced physical capacity within facilities to maintain social distancing
- Additional operating costs and requirements (cleaning, ppe)
- Requirements to reconfigure and invest in adaptations
- Need to adapt from open door facilities to pre-booked / appointment based services
- Increased pressure and reliance on mobile and cloud based IT systems and infrastructure

Respondents indicated a range of areas where additional support would be beneficial to their support for the community, and their own organisations sustainability and recovery.

- Unrestricted core funding to offset loss of trading income
- Support with fundraising and bid writing
- Development funding to enable planning for service transformation and business planning to support recovery
- Support to adapt and modify community buildings and spaces to make them more appropriate for use during COVID recovery and mitigate spread, e.g. installation of screens, reconfiguration, sanitizer dispensers, entry / capacity management systems

- Support with PPE (sourcing and guidance)
- Support with implementing additional cleaning regimes
- Guidance on how services can be adapted within changing constraints – helping speed up reintroduction / adaption of community services. Access to clear good practice guidance and assistance with compliance
- Better IT systems and infrastructure to enable more agile working
- Support to access devices to facilitate remote engagement and support for vulnerable clients
- Support to raise awareness of the work they are doing, to promote their offer, and secure support

Food Projects

A total of 37 food projects were identified as operating within One Manchester’s area of operation prior to COVID-19 (See Appendix 2). Some organisations operate more than one project, the results are broken down by project, not organisation.

The project are broadly classified as follows

Food Bank	18	Provide free food parcels
Pantries and food clubs	9	Provide selection of groceries for membership fee
Meal Providers	10	Provide cooked meals in community setting

As at 01 July, the current status of these food projects was:

Closed – no service	11	30%	Not operating due to challenges / restrictions from COVID-19
Alternative service being provided	15	41%	Adaptations include pre-arranged collection times, different venues, and home delivery services
Same service as before coronavirus	4	11%	Grocery drop off collection food clubs least affected
Unknown / Other	7	19%	

It is worth noting that a significant coordinated food response facilitated by Manchester City Council has partly mitigated the closure of some services

Mutual Aid Response

Formation

Mutual Aid Groups have been formed in a range of ways, in some cases with significant involvement and support from local councillors and public agencies, and in other cases by residents not directly linked to existing agencies.

Although most mutual aid groups have links with VCS organisations, including referral links some have been established outside of existing VCS, in some cases with support from local business premises

Key issues identified from Mutual Aid group research:

- Food has been the most significant issue that mutual aid groups have been supporting.
- Although there is some commonality in terms of ethos and approach, the operating model and service offer for each is different.
- A significant amount of support has been provided with very little by way of external funding or support, some groups have crowdfunded to support emergency food response.
- Some mutual aid groups have been able to respond quicker than more established organisations, possibly due to less constraints in terms of governance, regulation and accountability than more established formal organisation.
- Due to the nature of these groups, there is not a well-defined need for external funding, although some have had funding support from local fundraising campaigns, grant making organisations and public agencies. In most cases these has supported direct purchase of food and essential items. There has been very little or no requirements for overheads or operational funds.
- The groups have attracted a diverse range of volunteers with a wide range of skills, networks and connections. To some extent this has been possible due to people on furlough and is unlikely to be sustainable longer term.
- The diversity of those involved and connections to local community has enabled locally and culturally appropriate responses in a way that city and national responses have not been able to deliver. Whilst some have connected in with wider responses, they have largely operated in parallel with more formal welfare responses.
- It is unclear how long these groups will exist, but it is likely that there will be a range of legacy impacts as a result of the networks, collaborations and relationships developed.
- Some are beginning to think about how some of the benefits can be sustained. E.g. evolving into good neighbours schemes.

Conclusions and Next Steps

The impacts of COVID-19 on our communities, and VCS organisations is only beginning to be understood. Ongoing research is continuing to develop our understanding and inform our approach to supporting recovery, and mitigate some of the worst impact on our community. It is likely that new challenges resulting from the economic impacts of COVID-19 will continue to present new challenges, in particular as financial government support for furlough schemes is withdrawn.

One Manchester is keen to work in partnership with other organisations to help our communities survive and thrive through the gradual recovery from COVID-19, building on the strengths of community assets.

We are in the process of developing our community investment response which will comprise of a range of funding and support offers which includes:

- **Emergency Response Grants:** Support immediate responses relevant to food, financial resilience, or social isolation that are having impact but are constrained by resource in short term (next 3 months) – or - Support locally based organisations that provide services relevant to the above priorities that are facing significant threat in next 3-6 months as a result of loss of income from COVID-19.
- **Thematic Grants:** Open grants to support and enable responses to specific issues (e.g. Holiday Hunger, inequality of access to digital support services during COVID-19 restrictions).
 - In June we launched a Holiday Hunger Grant programme, from 30 applications received we awarded grants to 13 organisations totalling £17,000
- **Sustainability and Transformation Grants:** To support locally based organisations (including community hubs) to plan adapt, develop and implement services relevant to our investment priorities in the next 18 months.
- **Strategic Development – Large Investment:** To support the development and implementation of projects of significant scale and impact that are relevant to our COVID-19 recovery priorities. Projects support may relate to thematic issues that required coordinated response at ward, city or GM level. Initiatives may contribute to the “Build Back Better” recovery plans, seeking opportunities to support innovative community enterprises and businesses that build community resilience, e.g. supporting the development of more resilient and sustainable food projects.
 - We are currently supporting the development of an East Manchester Food hub with a view to establishing a sustainable food offer to mitigate some of the health and food poverty issues in the area.

If you would like to discuss One Manchester’s COVID-19 community investment response, or our ongoing research into the impacts of COVID-19 in our communities, please contact Anton Schultz, Social Investment Manager: anton.schultz@onemanchester.co.uk

Appendix 1 – Community Hubs Interviewed

Structured interviews were completed with the following community organisations and community hubs known to be operating centre based provision relevant to our priorities in our neighbourhoods before COVID-19

1. Anson Community Shop (Anson Cabin Project)
2. Aquarius Community Centre
3. Birch Community Centre
4. Church of the Resurrection & St Barnabas
5. Coverdale and Newbank
6. GIFT Academy - Brow House
7. Gorton Community Centre
8. Just Life
9. Levenshulme Inspire
10. Manchester Settlement
11. Mustard Tree
12. NIAMOS
13. Northmoor Community Association
14. Salvation Army
15. St Cross Church
16. St Lukes Church and Neighbourhood Centre
17. The Grange - 4CT
18. The Monastery Manchester
19. The Oasis Centre
20. The Old Abbey Taphouse
21. The Place (Fallowfield Library and Community Resource Centre)
22. The River Manchester
23. Trinity Community Resource Centre
24. Wai Yin Society
25. Youth on Solid Ground (Community on Solid Ground/ COSG)

Attempts were made to contact the following hubs, and some internet based research was undertaken to review available information about their COVID response, but structured interviews have not been completed due to lack of response or engagement in most cases.

1. 2/230 Manchester Scouts
2. Gorton Horticultural Society
3. HideOut Youth Zone
4. Hulme Community Garden Centre
5. Manchester Chinese Centre
6. Moss Side Millennium power house
7. Rainbow Haven (C/o The East Manchester Community Association - TENCA)
8. St Clements Church
9. Sure Start Clayton (the Wells Centre)
10. Sure Start Longsight (Big Life Families)
11. Victoria Baths (includes Friends of VB)

Appendix 2 – Food Projects Reviewed

Analysis of community food provision was based on research into the following food offers.

1. Bread and Butter Thing, The (Inspire)
2. Bread and Butter Thing, The (St Brigids)
3. Chrysalis Manchester
4. Compassion Prison Ministries
5. Cornerstone Day Centre
6. Coverdale and Newbank Community Food Club
7. Emmeline's Pantry Parlour
8. Fallowfield & Withington Trussell Trust (Holy Innocents)
9. Fallowfield & Withington Trussell Trust (The Place)
10. Fallowfield Community Grocer (The Place)
11. Feed My City - Coverdale
12. Feed My City - New Brunswick
13. Feed My city - Transformation Resource Centre
14. Feed My City (Whalley Range)
15. FoodCycle Manchester
16. Fountain Gate Chapel
17. Gorton Community Grocer
18. Hulme Community Grocer
19. Justlife Health & Enterprise Centre
20. Manchester Central Trussell Trust
21. Manchester South Central Trussell Trust (St Edmunds)
22. New Covenant Church
23. New Longsight Housing Co-op
24. Rainbow Christian Centre
25. Rainbow Haven
26. Restore Food Bank Arise & Shine Christian Ministries
27. Revive
28. Salvation Army Manchester City Centre
29. Salvation Army Openshaw
30. St Cross Church
31. The Children's Society (Zion Centre)
32. The Oasis Centre
33. The River, Manchester

Appendix 3 - Primary Area of Benefit

