Connections and cross-sector working during coronavirus (COVID-19)

Report for the Scottish Voluntary and Communities Sector Resilience Advisory Group

presence
contributions
community
dignity
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vaccination
love
resilience
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adaptability
partnership
hopefulness
recovery
participation
encouragement
listen
fairness
uncertainly
connections
challenge
wellbeing
balance
sharing
sausages
optimistic

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Acknowledgements and thanks

Executive Summary

This research develops a fuller understanding of cross sector collaboration across public, community and third sector organisations and the emerging range of coronavirus (COVID-19) focused community groups. It is future focused, concerned primarily with making the collective effort stronger in the evolving crisis. A combination of data from a survey of key stakeholders and ten stories of practice are used; and the detail of the responses illustrates often unusual or ingenious response to problem-solving that might offer inspiration to others and there are recurring themes, particularly in relation to new ways of working together. This material was discussed at a participatory Exchange Event to test resonance and develop the implications for future practice, policy development and any further research, as shared in this report.

"Let's not lose the learning from this – so we don't go back to square one the next time something like this happens."
(Event participant)

Key insights

- Connection and collaboration enabled organisations to play to their strengths, greater speed and frequency of practical collaboration, the ability to respond to the priorities of those most severely affected and a clear, shared purpose to galvanise efforts. Sharing of resources, pooling of data, and avoiding duplication of effort happened less frequently.

- The picture of on-the-ground responses to COVID-19 highlights the provision of practical and emotional help. There has been a range of activities, many involving the logistics of the distribution of food and other essential supplies, use of volunteers or the redeployment of staff into emergency response roles, distribution and deployment of IT, and support for those responding to COVID-19 workplace outbreaks or adaptation of their own ways of operating to meet the new challenges.

- The research illustrates a sense of 'doing the right thing', that barriers were being broken down, and that collaboration that might have seemed a stretch in the past, was now possible. People and organisations have shown themselves to be flexible, with a considerable 'can-do' proactive attitude and desire to go more than the extra mile to help others. Issues that had previously been

barriers have been tackled and workarounds adopted. As said at the event, 'community were the experts on this occasion'.

- The COVID-19 response has cemented local relationships and connections and enabled the development of some newer ones, with a strong focus on the very local. The response has been largely from staff and volunteers in locally focused community and voluntary sector groups, where over half of organisations had not been involved in resilience work before.

- The whole experience of the pandemic has been a period of rapid learning, creativity and adaptation as people have stepped outside the usual ways of working. This has created important shifts in mindsets and ways of working and has enabled a broader understanding of resilience to encompass wellbeing, as well as emergency response.

Challenges

It is important to note that not everyone felt well connected or were not included in the wider response in the way they might have expected. There have been challenges and at times these difficulties are an ongoing issue.

- For some, there was disappointment in a lack of communication or leadership where it had been expected. There were sometimes issues relating to PPE, keeping information up to date and issues of confidentiality.

- There has been duplicated support and clashes of meetings in some areas, exposing a need for better coordination. Funding was not always available. There were also many difficulties associated with working online, including unease or inability to use, or blockage of certain IT platforms and delays in finalising data-sharing agreements and purchasing devices.

- Disputes, conflict, and fragmentation have sometimes been ascribed to tiredness, personality clashes and lack of support from outside. Some groups encountered resistance from established elected councillors and officials and difficulties in getting timely and relevant information from regional level agencies.

So what, now what?

There is a clear and compelling drive amongst the research participants to maintain the momentum and build on the learning from the COVID-19 experience. Many people are now very thoughtful about and focused on what the legacy of this experience will be. Some of the issues that became very stark during the lockdown, such as poverty and food insecurity, were there well before the pandemic and remain entrenched. Most immediately, there are important messages that as COVID-19-related restrictions are ongoing, there are prevailing needs that still need to be met.

With this recognition, there is a desire to build on what has emerged from this situation and influence organisational cultures and operations so that the role and expertise of staff and volunteers is more widely acknowledged and strengthened. This sits alongside anxiety that systems, particularly public services, may revert to old norms and ways of working. Despite rapid developments, digital exclusion is a live issue and continuing to listen and learn from communities remains essential.

Next steps

Most learning and review processes have been informal and there is now a need for systematic, joint learning and reflection across the voluntary and statutory sectors to review the experience at a local level and develop lessons about future delivery models.

- Support for communities in non-emergency situations is an important part of the recovery picture and an opportunity to develop the good collaborative relationships essential in any emergency response. The research participants recognise the value of having an established resilience plan or being involved in planning at an earlier stage and that resilience planning, social renewal and recovery are opportunities for the third sector to be treated as equal partners.

- An expansion of the engagement between a wider cross-section of the voluntary and community sector and resilience partnerships is now essential and existing place and issue-based partnership arrangements might adopt a resilience and emergency preparation dimension.

- Learning should explore barriers to collaboration within a local authority and between sectors, for example, finance structures and procurement, and seek ways to encourage collaboration. There is a chance to rethink risk and develop accountability based on trust and collaboration, impact, and quality.

- There is a need to raise the profile of the Voluntary and Community Sector Resilience Advisory Group and to clarify its 'slow' and 'fast time' roles from a position supporting the existing resilience structures between public services and the voluntary and community sector, able to play a part to hold public services to account and keep the voluntary and community sector informed and connected.

"If we don't know them – they don't know us! We need to know what they're about."
(Event participant)

It is hoped that this research can be a catalyst for continuing and locally or organisationally focused reflection and review of what is needed to sustain and enhance connections and cross-sector working in response to COVID-19. The invitation is to use the report to reflect on and review your own experience of the COVID-19 resilience response.

The report provides eight 'Practice Pointers' intended to support group-based reflection on practice, to challenge, provoke and stretch thinking about existing ideas and practices.

Reflections as you read.....

- **What stands out for you from this research and why?**
- **What surprises you?**
- **What are you curious about?**
- **Who might you share this report with?**
- **How could you use reflections on this research and on your own experience to make a positive change to your connections or resilience activities?**

1. Introduction and context

The capability, strength and humanity of communities and the voluntary sector are an essential part of Scotland's resilience to any major national challenges. This has never been more apparent in recent years than in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In May 2020 the VCS RAG[1] was convened from members of the Voluntary Sector Resilience Partnership, including some organisations that become involved through the response to COVID-19. The brief was to support the VCS Advisor to the Scottish Resilience Partnership by providing insight on the issues affecting the sector and highlighting VCS activities to support the COVID-19 effort nationally, as well as strengthening action based on real-time reflection and dialogue within the third and community sectors, and public sector agencies.

In the early days of the pandemic, it was clear that what communities and the organisations working with them were achieving together was already extraordinary and that the VCS RAG could be helpful in gathering and positioning this experience to drive improvement in wider partnership work.

The group recognised the need to capture the added value achieved by cross-sector working and those experiences of collaborative working between communities, voluntary sector groups and the wider public sector; to explore what worked well, as well as what didn't, and how collaborative working could be strengthened to benefit the potential for joint effort in future challenges.

This report is not unique in its interests. It is linked to other learning and new types of national networking, but what is different is that our emphasis is on understanding the nuts and bolts of local collaborative working and delivering partnerships on the ground.

The intention of the members of the VCS RAG, is to share this research and encourage its use to improve partnership activity on community resilience in each of our respective organisations and beyond. And to use the lessons and reflective questions identified to engage with our networks and partners across the voluntary, community and public sectors. This will include engagement and joint planning

activity between voluntary and community sector organisations involved in emergency resilience work and the broader third and community sector as a key priority for future resilience planning.

Readers are encouraged to reflect on their own experiences of cross-sector connections, collaborations and partnership working during the pandemic, or any other major challenge that you and your organisation has faced.

- **How can you make positive changes to your connections or resilience activities?**

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1 Core membership of the Voluntary and Communities Sector Resilience Advisory Group (VCS RAG) includes Third Sector Interfaces, Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations, Scottish Community Development Centre and Volunteer Scotland. Representatives from other networks and projects have also been invited to contribute their insight on matters such as food insecurity, community testing, and local authority response and recovery activities.

Purpose and objectives

The purpose of the research is to learn from the first phase of the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to how public, community and voluntary sector organisations worked together and to build on this experience to further strengthen working links between all those delivering the ongoing COVID-19 resilience effort.[2]

This research is future focused, concerned primarily with making the collective effort stronger in the evolving crisis.

> Research reports are often criticised for 'sitting on the shelf': here the invitation is to read and use the report to reflect on and review your own experience of the COVID-19 resilience response. In this way, the continuing challenges can be met with a more effective response and the work of vital recovery can be built on those foundations.
>
> We invite you to share any reflections or ideas that arise for you from this research with the VCS AG.[3]

Research methods

This research methods were designed to make the best use of the available resources and practical constraints and provide a springboard for further research or development work that may follow on. All data collection and analysis has been conducted online. The principal methods have been:

Online survey of key stakeholders: this was conducted November-December 2020 and achieved a non-random, purposive sample of 259 responses.[4] The survey focused on roles in delivering COVID-19 support in each area; key partners and local operational relationships; good and challenging examples of ways of working and attitudes; how to sustain and build on positive practices and what still needs to change.

Key informant interviews/stories of practice: ten informant interviews were conducted in November-December 2020 with a selection of respondents from across the range of organisations involved in the community COVID-19 response. These interviews focused on building stories of practice to highlight good and challenging examples of ways of working and attitudes, ideas about how to sustain and build on positive practices and what still needs to change. Each of these accounts has been approved by the respective informant and are included in Annex 1.

Exchange Event: an online event was held on 3rd February 2021 attended by over 40 participants.[5] This was an opportunity to share the initial findings from the survey and key informant interviews, test resonance and relevance and discuss the implications for future practice, policy development and any further research.

This report draws together this material and it is hoped that this will act as a catalyst for continuing local and national dialogue about what is needed to sustain and enhance connections and cross-sector working in response to COVID-19. The number of responses and the opportunity to test the survey findings with the participants at the Exchange Event gives us confidence in the validity of the experience as reported here.

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2 The full objectives of the research are included in Annex 3.
3 ReadyScotland@gov.scot

4 More than half of the individual people responding were primarily working at an operational or service delivery level within their organisation. The rest were in strategic, tactical or operational roles or spanned all three roles.
5 Over 70 people registered for this event. There was considerable drop-off on the day, in particular from statutory organisations, which may have been due to the need for some organisations to be involved in responding to severe weather. The event was held on Zoom, which is the most accessible platform for non-statutory organisations. However, some statutory organisations were not able to access this platform. At this point in time, there is no single platform that is universally accessible due to organisational policies and this issue remains a major blockage for on-line cross-sectoral engagement.

2. Stories of Practice

The stories bring the experience of responding to the pandemic to life, from across a range of organisations and are shared in full in Annex 1. This would be a good place to start reading this report.

These are stories of practical collaboration, told by individuals from a small sample of organisations involved in cross-sector collaboration in response to COVID-19. The further practical examples shared by survey respondents in section 3 echo the themes highlighted here.

The accounts provided describe a range of activities, many involving the logistics of the distribution of food and other essential supplies, use of volunteers or the redeployment of staff into emergency response roles, distribution and deployment of IT and support for those responding to COVID-19 workplace outbreaks or adaptation of their own ways of operating to meet the new challenges, such as responding to floods during a pandemic.

The detail of the responses illustrates often unusual or ingenious response to problem-solving that might offer inspiration to others and there are themes that recur throughout many of the stories, particularly in relation to new ways of working together.

...the sense that 'we're all in this together' has broken down some barriers, there's less 'them' and 'us'. It was always there, but it has strengthened and opened a considerable number of doors in the corporate world.

I think this experience has given me confidence to think about what's the right thing to do, rather than being more mindful of 'my place', not wanting to step on toes.

...I think people have realised their world will not implode if they ignore some of their previous stringencies and rules; that it is possible to be a bit more flexible, a bit more 'can-do', rather than give reasons 'why not'.

What I've really valued here is the ease and openness with which people from all agencies – both within and without Government, have responded.

That is a really useful collaboration [with the TSI]; it's an existing relationship, but it's got stronger. I think it is interesting that, despite the challenges, or maybe even because of the challenges, these links and connections have got stronger.

The expertise of staff is more valued now because of COVID-19; in a crisis, you can't ignore it. That's why it's so important to allow staff to have more agency – it's essential to making organisations more effective.

Lockdown was a period of learning for us...

The 'ease and openness' with which people from different agencies have responded is valued. There is a sense of 'doing the right thing', that barriers were being broken down, and that new possibilities for collaboration that might have seemed a stretch in the past, were now possible. People and organisations have shown themselves to be flexible, with a considerable 'can-do' proactive attitude and desire to go more than the extra mile to help others. Issues that had previously been barriers have been tackled and workarounds adopted.

Here are a few examples where people have stepped outside the usual ways of working, usually with an element of welcome realisation or surprise.

- **Discovering just how readily everybody was happy to talk to me** (Story 1).
- **Sweeping away the old reasons 'why not' and saying, 'you know what, we can….'** (Story 3).
- **The world will not implode if we take a risk** (Story 3).
- **Tackling the potential stigma of accepting food supplies by emphasising the benefits of reducing food waste** (Story 5).
- **Using a service such as food delivery to maintain and build existing relationships between people and services** (Story 10).
- **Suspending the rules a little to help people without going through all the protocols** (Story 6).
- **Realising that as a public service we could be more proactive in talking to citizens ourselves** (Story 6).
- **Seeing how better connections help to avoid duplication of response** (Story 7).
- **Feeling valued for my on-the-ground knowledge and community connections** (Story 7).
- **Realising how more organisations could contribute to resilience response and planning** (Story 8).
- **Not all bureaucracy is there for the sake of it: let's work out what is useful and important** (Story 8).
- **Adaptability and change to how we work is possible** (Story 9).

There have been challenges and some accounts raise bigger policy or structural issues. Even so, immediate challenges have generally been overcome and for some, have helped to strengthen relationships.

The experience has highlighted the value of the on-the-ground knowledge, that 'could not be ignored in a crisis' of this kind and signals a wider recognition of different kinds of expertise, where solutions might lie and the importance of collaboration that shows that we are all in this together. For example, recognition of the essential knowledge of staff who work directly with people in communities, of people able to help those without English language skills or with limited literacy to navigate the challenges of the pandemic all helps to drive new ways of responding. And this works both ways; for example, the 'feedback' loop of sharing knowledge about cultural responses and attitudes amongst non-English speaking communities has also been a benefit to more strategic agencies.

There have been other benefits. Many people talk of a refreshment of their own ideas and confidence, of how their confidence to act was enhanced by dialogue with communities and other organisations and of changes in how they wish to work in the future.

> *"It has refreshed our ideas and given us more confidence. It has led to us having a stronger team ethic and a clearer focus on the idea that we could be doing more of our usual community engagement like this…..It has shaped the work that is happening going forward."*
> (Public Service)

Lockdown has been a period of rapid learning, creativity and adaptation for many and some are very aware of the shift in their mindset that this has created.

> *"It's a no-brainer to do it this way, but I don't think I would have thought about it in the same way before COVID-19."*
> (Community Development Trust)

There is a sense that COVID-19 has accelerated trends or ideas that might previously have not gained traction in the same way. One example is changing how resilience is thought about, from something largely concerned with initial public safety responses to physical events, extreme weather conditions, environmental disasters, or accidents, to something broader, longer term and more far-reaching:

> *"…the best legacy will be enduring changes to how we think about resilience…..COVID-19 was quite a different type of response, as much about food shortages, isolation, loneliness and so on, and as things have gone on, the concept of resilience has had to change….. Without COVID-19, I can't see that we would have been able to have got this done for the next 5 years."*
>
> (TSI)

Many are thoughtful and focused on what the legacy of this experience will be at individual, organisational and partnership level and express hopes for a different way of doing things in the future.

> *"…We might also do a health-check on some of the pre-existing practices, so we know what is valuable and necessary and what's not. It would be fair to say that not all of it was there for the sake of being there."*
>
> (TSI)

Reflections

- **Which stories or parts of these stories stand out for you and why?**
- **How could you use reflections on these stories to make a positive change to your connections or resilience activities?**
- **What would you like to happen more of the time?**
- **What are hazards and threats which might cause need in different forms in the future?**
- **What are the resistances or difficulties of response that you experience or anticipate, for yourself and other people?**

3. Mobilising existing and new connections

Profile of survey respondents

Respondents were contacted because they were likely to have experience of interest to the research.[6] There are fewer responses from public service agencies than might have been hoped; however, this does provide a useful picture of on the ground responses to COVID-19 and the profile of the respondents is important to bear in mind when interpreting the findings.

More than eight out of ten respondents were a community group, community council, voluntary sector group, social enterprise or Third Sector Interface. Most of these voluntary and community sector respondents had a local focus.

- VCS
- Statutory
- Other
- Emergency
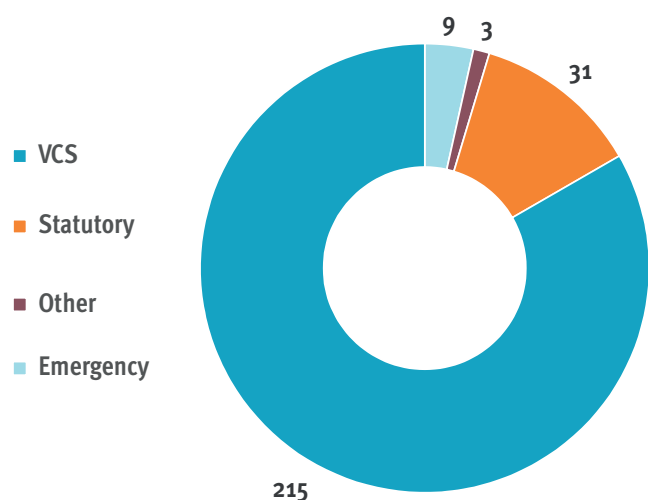
Over one in ten responses were from a Local Authority, Community Planning Partnership, Health and Social Care Partnership, the NHS or the Scottish Government.

The remainder were a mix of emergency response organisations and other organisations, including the Armed Forces Local Resilience Partnership support and mountain rescue.

- Most organisations supported the general public or a specific geographical locality. A very small number supported a specific community of interest, such as older people, people living with dementia or those with mental health issues.

- Almost half of organisations served a very local community or single neighbourhood, with a further 23% working across neighbourhoods within a single local authority.

- Eight out of ten organisations had made some use of volunteers in their COVID-19 response, with the majority of those saying they made extensive use of volunteers.

No previous involvement in emergency resilience work before COVID-19	Some previous experience	Primary focus
53%	34%	13%

- Eight out of ten organisations had made some use of volunteers in their COVID-19 response, with the majority of those saying they made extensive use of volunteers.

Figure 1 shows that voluntary and community sector organisations were more likely than other organisations to have no previous experience of emergency resilience work.

Figure 1: Previous experience of emergency resilience work by sector

- No
- Yes, not our primary focus but we have some experience
- Yes, this is our primary focus

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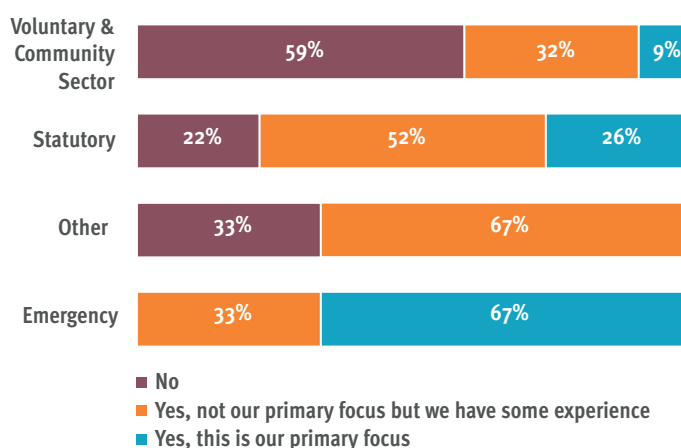
6 Geographical data is available for 79% of survey respondents: based on this we are confident that we have responses from organisations within 30 of the 32 local authorities in Scotland, which includes all non-central belt authorities.

Mobilising connections and practical actions

The COVID-19 response has cemented local relationships and enabled the development of some newer ones, with a strong focus on the very local. Most of the existing connections mobilised were with other individual groups at a community level, local authority community engagement teams and networks of local groups. Particularly given the lack of previous involvement in emergency resilience work, the ability to mobilise these existing connections illustrated the value of community infrastructure where it already existed.

> *"The majority of our connections were existing connections. Everyone refocused on what was needing done and got on with it, ensuring local needs were met quickly and efficiently."*
> (Community Anchor Organisation)

> *"We formed an emergency COVID-19 response team with another local third sector group, our Development Trust and a local church. We had limited support from the local authority initially and no direction. We made our own plans, set up our own database, obtained considerable funding and within weeks we're providing meals to elderly and isolated, shopping, delivery of meds, delivering food hampers and emergency care packages to families. We are 10 months on still busy with large group of volunteers with us from start."*
> (Community or voluntary group supporting local people)

Connections with a local focus were the most important and practical, for example, with other Third Sector organisations, local businesses, or medical practices. These connections sometimes brought access to a pool of volunteers. The patterns of connection largely reflected the urgency of need for localised responses; wider connections were sometimes seen as not having the necessary local knowledge, although such wider relationships might be mobilised later.

> *"Our organisation was already working with a group of around 14 organisations in our locality so it seemed natural that we should step up and do what we could to help support and coordinate all the volunteering activity. We also connected with our local authority, representative of SCDC with whom we were already working, our local TSI, plus another emergency response group in a neighbouring area. We had connections with the Red Cross, local pharmacist, and had lots of contact with our local Highlands & Islands Enterprise contact."*
> (Community Anchor Organisation)

> *"As an anchor organisation we are in touch with many partners and potential partners and are familiar with collaborative working. The reaction to the pandemic was initially and principally a third sector mobilisation with other agencies following on. The localness of the response was a key contribution and valued by the very local community."*
> (Community Anchor Organisation)

For some, the connections to organisations and networks focused upon emergency and resilience response were a new development because of COVID-19. New connections were most frequently made with networks of groups involved in emergency response work, and other networks and groups working at a community level.

Some organisations took on new role as an anchor organisation or group or new collaborations for example, around applying for funding, sharing information. Some were able to draw on earlier resilience planning, such as for flooding.

Engagement was sometimes piecemeal, partly attributed to the nature of the initial circumstances, nevertheless, there was a sense of local ground-level mobilisation.

> *"We had good knowledge of our community and the groups within it and were able to make a reasonable response to things like food delivery, ensuring safety in shops and supporting vulnerable people."*
> (Community or voluntary group supporting local people)

Respondents suggest that there was lots of variation in different parts of the country. It is important to note that not everyone felt so well connected or were not sought out in the way they might have expected. Contrary to expectations, some organisations cut back on the use of volunteers. Further exploration of these issues might be important for future community development and place-making investment and linkages with the resilience agenda, both to increase awareness of that agenda and to be able to re-mobilise local links should the need arise again.

For some, there was disappointment in a lack of communication or leadership where it had been expected for example, from elected councillors.

> *"The local authorities were slow to engage and advise at first and reluctant to commit to decisions, so we found ourselves working to the needs of the people."*
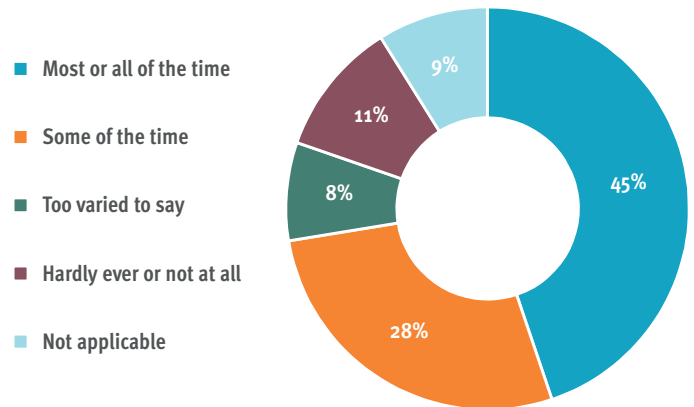> (Community or voluntary group supporting local people)

There was acknowledgement that changing responses and definitions of restrictions make it 'almost impossible to get a proper foothold on what needs to be done.' Communities were 'left to make things up as we went along'; whilst sometimes successfully, in others causing disruption, misunderstandings, confusion for the public and strain and overwork amongst the responders. Collaboration was not necessarily easy; as new groups formed, communications sometimes broke down. These challenges are discussed further below.

Figure 2 in Annex 2 shows the usefulness of connections in a practical sense.[7] The top three most frequently cited factors were enabling organisations to play to their strengths, enabling greater speed and frequency of practical collaboration and the ability to respond to the priorities of those most severely affected.
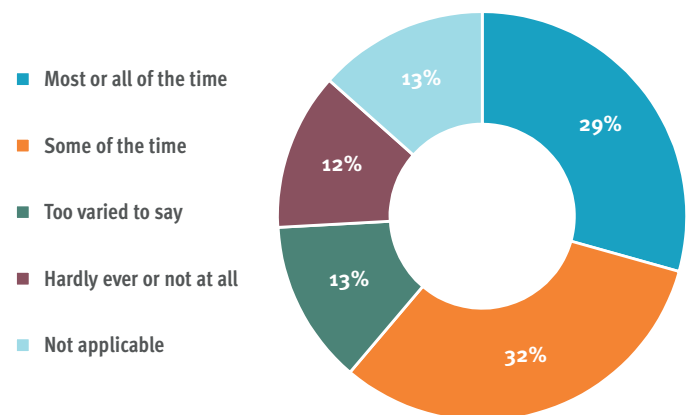
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7 The categories used here and in Figures 2, 3a and 3b were based on previous knowledge of partnership work and informed by a recent interim research report by New Philanthropy Capital **Coordination in place project** (**thinknpc. org**)

Enabling us to play to our strengths as an organisation

- Most or all of the time
- Some of the time
- Too varied to say
- Hardly ever or not at all
- Not applicable

9%
11%
8%
45%
28%

Sharing of resources, pooling of data and avoiding duplication of effort did also happen, but less frequently.

Avoiding duplication of effort

- Most or all of the time
- Some of the time
- Too varied to say
- Hardly ever or not at all
- Not applicable

13%
12%
13%
29%
32%

Over half of survey respondents provided some examples of what practical collaboration made possible. Most of the examples highlighted food and related support initiatives such as providing food parcels, hot food, undertaking shopping and sharing unsold food from local supermarkets or donations, often with the support of volunteers. Other help included delivering prescriptions directly to local people, as well as providing other practical and emotional help. Some of the support initiatives started as spontaneous ideas but became more established or integrated into existing structures.

Whilst the degree of collaboration between and across sectors is not known, the collective efforts that were mobilised enabled:

- **Locality-based leadership and operational responsiveness:** speedy mobilisation of effort and coordination, enabled a greater scale of response including coordination across local authorities and with the NHS, bringing in resources and working on joint solutions. At its best, this built on the spontaneity of local responses, making these efforts more structured and secure, gave local organisations access to systems already in place and avoided duplication. At times there was a removal or sidestepping of bureaucracy for example, to release funding, and smaller organisations were able to get access to funds or support to apply for funding, otherwise not available to them.

- **Extension of the reach of response:** collaboration helped to reach those that were particularly vulnerable, maximising the impact and number of people who were able to receive support. Some organisations used their knowledge and skills to make official information more accessible, for example, for people with special needs.

- **Sharing of information and insight:** collaboration has been a way to 'find out who does what' and to share intelligence and insight into wider or deeper issues encountered during the response. In some instances, this led to a better understanding by central government or larger agencies of the local issues and gave them access to immediate innovative responses to problems, particularly where they have worked with agencies not usually part of the resilience landscape.[8]

- **Maintenance of services:** at times when some mainstream service staff have been redeployed, collaboration has enabled the identification or plugging of gaps, supporting the maintenance of some existing services to a degree or helped to re-establish activities crucial to health and wellbeing.
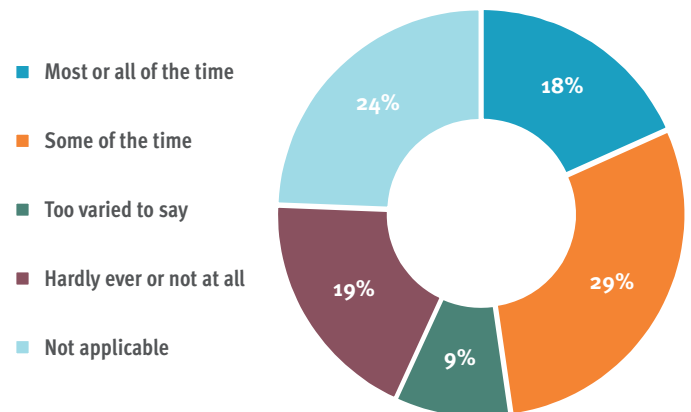
The survey did not ask directly about the impact of redeployment of staff to emergency roles, or whether the need to deploy in this way was a consequence of gaps in mainstream local resilience and emergency planning services. Discussion of this gap in our knowledge highlights these issues are worthy of further consideration in the next stage of this research, including understanding how moving staff, particularly those from partnership or engagement roles, may create unintended consequences.

Figure 3 in Annex 2 shows the top three enabling factors that have influenced practical collaboration most of the time were being solution focused, sharing awareness of underlying social issues exacerbated by the crisis and greater willingness to listen to the voices of those most affected.

Being solution focused

- Most or all of the time
- Some of the time
- Too varied to say
- Hardly ever or not at all
- Not applicable

56%, 19%, 8%, 5%, 12%

Greater willingness to take risks

- Most or all of the time
- Some of the time
- Too varied to say
- Hardly ever or not at all
- Not applicable

18%, 29%, 9%, 19%, 24%
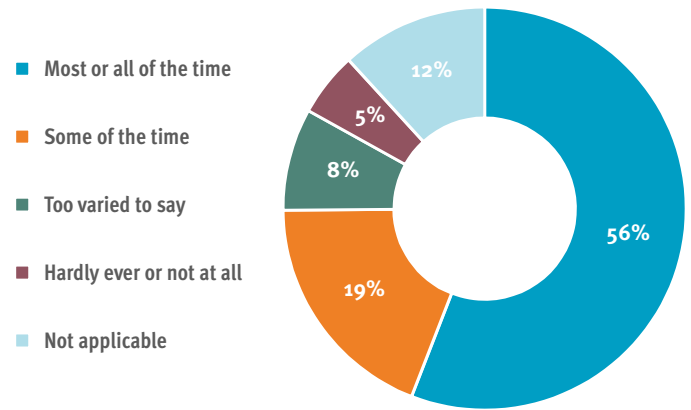
There was more variable experience in categories like greater willingness to take risks, being authorised to take decisions previously taken elsewhere or the relinquishing of power and decision making to other organisations.

8   Story 1 is a good example.

What have been the challenges?

Whilst most of the examples provided by respondents were positive and demonstrated the benefit of close constructive relationships between established agencies and local communities, there were some practical and relational challenges. These include:

- Issues relating to PPE, particularly in the earlier days. There was also the enduring challenge of keeping information up to date amidst an ever-changing situation. Issues of confidentiality sometimes made the exchange of information impossible and therefore some people will have slipped through the net.

- There has been duplicated support and clashes of meetings in some areas, exposing a need for better coordination.

- Funding was not always available, for example, for the costs of basic delivery services.

- There were many difficulties associated with working online, including unease or inability to use certain IT platforms and delays in finalising data-sharing agreements and purchasing devices.

"The Council did not communicate at all with us for first couple of months; they then queried Zoom meetings, then recommended them. We were the first Community Council to start doing meetings like that which was vital to find out and share information of what was happening in our communities."
(Community Council)

- The interface with existing services could also bring challenges, although there were examples of negotiation and resolution of difficulties through joined-up working. For example:

  - Some people had pre-existing services and support withdrawn leaving them with significant challenges in addressing their personal care and other needs. On the other hand, some respondents report that the COVID-19 response became an opportunity to check and confirm that Social Services were involved with some vulnerable residents.

  - Other respondents found that their well-intended efforts, for example to provide a food parcel, was seen to undermine existing arrangements for someone under supervision of social work services and whilst this was resolved, it was tricky to navigate.

- There have been disputes, conflict, and fragmentation. Some ascribe this to tiredness, personality clashes and lack of support from outside. For some people this is an ongoing issue.

- Again, the relationships between community groups and the local authority or local councillors have not always been positive. Some groups encountered resistance from established elected councillors and officials and difficulties in getting timely and relevant information from regional level agencies.

"Local community groups built a stronger alliance and united front for our area since COVID-19. We continue to face strong resistance from Local Councillors and some officers to work with us. After many meeting invitations, we have had some success ...but it is generally disappointing how reluctant and threatened our elected and paid Councillors are to support anything that is community led."
(Community Council)

"Timely and relevant information from regional level (council & health board) was very difficult if not impossible to obtain. We were often made to feel that local resilience was not community council business, and it should be left to 'professionals'. Perseverance was sometimes successful in getting to speak to right person!"
(Community Council)

4. Learning and reflection: debriefing, review, and adaptation

In the context of the immediacy and urgency of the emergency response and the disruption to any sense of 'business as usual', the extent of innovation and adaptation seen would not have been possible without at least a degree of rapid 'learning on the go'.

Seventy-two percent of survey respondents stated that they did some form of debrief or review of their activities during the response to COVID-19. However, the lower numbers of respondents answering this question probably overstates the extent of this kind of activity, at least as conventionally understood.

Most of those debrief activities reported by respondents were informal processes described as 'reaching out' to staff and volunteers to identify lessons on an ongoing basis, or reviewing activities at regular board, management or committee meetings against the latest guidance and needs within their communities.

Where respondents noted that they participated in more formal processes, these included internal and external debriefing activities with lines of reporting or surveying the communities they serve. The most frequently cited adaptations were:

- **Use of digital media:** the most noted adaption to services has been the use of digital media to replace or enhance communications between groups, staff, volunteers, and their communities. In some cases, respondents said they moved services online, and intend that this should continue to some extent once lockdown phases ease in part or fully. In general, this was a positive adaptation, however there were a few who noted that online communications could not replace the value gained through face-to-face interactions.

- **Flexibility and speed of support:** many groups have been adapting on an ongoing basis and being flexible in how they support their communities, scaling-up and down the intensity of support needed in response to the various phases of lockdown and recovery. The speed with which organisations have been able to act, adapt and deliver services was noted, and the assurance that experience gives should they have to stand-up again to further wide-scale crises.

- **Modified or reduced services:** out of necessity for compliance with COVID-19 restrictions, there were various modifications of the services respondents offered to their communities. These included moving from group meetings to one-to-one support, reducing capacity in services and modifying working spaces. Whilst the ability to adapt services quickly has been essential to the immediate viability of organisations and teams, for some respondents these adaptations are having a negative impact on their longer-term sustainability and income generation. It is also worth noting there will be a need to constantly adapt to different operating conditions, including the re-opening of existing services, to ensure communities are supported in a safe way, for some time to come.

- **Building on spontaneous activities:** in some cases, the work that was undertaken in spontaneous response to the immediate needs within a community became an established part of respondents' activities. There were also examples where spontaneous volunteering in response to this crisis has resulted in establishment of a volunteering force within the community.

"The group of volunteers that came forward organised by us, has now evolved into a permanent volunteer force currently under the umbrella of the community council."
(Community Council)

"A major need has been to maintain connectivity with elderly residents living in isolation and the network of social care and contact provided via our community organisations and volunteers."
(Community group)

"Following the lessons learnt we're looking at implementing a revised volunteer coordination structure."
(Charity operating at a regional/national level)

- **Improving collaborations:** respondents noted that they would seek to continue to work in partnership or collaboratively with the groups they had connected with during the height of response; this might include improving communications and building relationships or expanding partnership work to include new organisations. How this might best be done could be the focus of a learning review of collaboration to date, to acknowledge the strengths and successes as a basis for future collaboration and improvement.
- **Changes to structures or staffing:** some respondents have made changes to their internal structures and processes, whereas others have tapped into reporting structures outwith their organisations, such as local authority networks or resilience partnerships. Changes have also taken place within some groups to their information flows, policies and procedures as a result of their experiences.
- **Volunteer wellbeing and coordination:** the expansion of volunteer numbers and spontaneous volunteering enabled some respondent to build on their activities in recruiting, supporting and coordinating volunteers.
- **Widening scope:** a theme from several responses was around the broadening on the scope of services and activities they were delivering, considering what was needed by their communities or customers, and the intention for that to continue.

Whatever formal or informal processes of learning took place, it is clearly important to review the experience at a local level and develop lessons about future delivery models; this is a theme taken up by the participants at the Exchange Event and in the development of Practice Pointers, reported in section 5.

What might have been done differently?

Respondents were asked for their retrospective reflections about whether they felt they should have done anything differently over the last six to nine months. Whilst many gave specific responses particular to their situations, organisations and stakeholders, there were a few overarching themes, useful to consider in thinking about how enhance readiness and resilience for the future. These are all important lines of inquiry for the next stage of this research.

- Respondents noted that it would have been better and more effective, to be more coordinated with other local groups and organisations at an earlier stage.
- There was also desire for more self-empowerment at a community level, with an appropriate infrastructure in place to allow for recognition of the value of the community response and less reliance on decisions made by a local authority.
- Respondents noted the need to establish contacts with a local authority or other public sector body to better identify people in communities who needed support.

"We struggled to get any real traction with the public sector and couldn't access accurate shielding data or accurate information on who was most at risk. We overcame this with word of mouth, but the public sector responses were too slow."
(Community Anchor Organisation)

- The use of communication tools is a recurring theme; respondents wished they had had established routes of communication with community or volunteers and had experience of using online communication tools to reach their main audiences. There was a parallel recognition of the issues of equity of access to digital tools and platforms (both availability and skills) to support communication.
- Noting that many of the practical responses reported here appear to have come from outwith any planning process, there was recognition of the putative value of having an established resilience plan or being involved in planning at an earlier stage. What form any future engagement in such planning processes might be explored further in the next stage of this research.

5. So what, what now?

The Exchange Event in February 2021 was an opportunity to check the resonance of the initial research findings and move into a discussion about implications for practice at local and national levels.[9]

In general terms, the experiences described in the research resonated strongly with the event participants; they reflected that 'community were the experts on this occasion'. They endorsed the description of a rapid, creative, bespoke, and speedy response mobilised by proactive communities and voluntary sector agencies, stepping in to meet needs in 'a vacuum', where 'nobody knew whose role it was to step in'.

There was interest in how to build on what has emerged from this situation and influence organisational cultures and operations so that the role and expertise of staff and volunteers is more widely acknowledged and strengthened. There was also anxiety that systems, particularly public services, would revert to the old 'norm' of meetings and 'red tape' and that 'we are not out of the woods yet, in terms of still needing immediate action'.

There was some surprise that just over half of organisations had not been involved in resilience work before and this raised issues for future involvement in readiness and resilience work.

> *"It is interesting that as a person involved in community engagement and work with the voluntary and community sector, I don't come across the 'resilience' people."*
> (Event participant)

This finding may in part reflect the profile of the survey respondents who have not historically been part of resilience networks, nevertheless it is worth noting that, whilst this was not explored fully at the event, there was certainly a level of interest in being more closely connected to these networks in the future and this is an issue that the Resilience Advisory Group might explore more fully.

Partnership working was acknowledged to be skilled and time-consuming work, that requires support and resources. The initial discussions raised questions about whether the partnership working that had been so important would be able to continue, given the on-going pandemic and, for some, unresolved funding issues.

There were questions raised about what form partnership work would take in the future, including who would lead these resilience partnerships, given the much broader framing of resilience to encompass a wider range of response and the need for an overview of what is happening where and what's possible. There was recognition that some of the issues that became very stark during the lockdown, such as poverty and food insecurity, were there well before the pandemic and remain so. This may suggest that to extend the reach of community resilience support, existing place and issue-based partnership arrangements might adopt a resilience and emergency preparation dimension.

A plenary exercise known as an Unfolding Story[10], was used to enable live feedback to all the participants and a synthesis of the issues and themes provoked by the findings and initial discussion. This was also a platform for moving on to discuss specific actions. The approach used four opening sentence prompts, which participants are invited to complete, using the chat function. These were:

- My word of the moment is…
- I've really valued…
- Let's stop…
- It's a bit radical but let's start…

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9 Survey respondents came from across urban and rural Scotland.

10 We used an on-line adaptation of the method described here **http://myhomelife.uws.ac.uk/scotland/resources/unfolding-stories-tool/**

My word of the moment is...

community · resilience · vaccination · presence · contributions · dignity · inspired · love · caution · hope · cooperation · keep · volunteers · learning · going · enthusiasm · partnership · tired · momentum · adaptability · exhaustion · hopefulness · participation · encouragement · recovery · listen · fairness · uncertainly · challenge · wellbeing · connections · balance · sharing · sausages · optimistic

The creation of the full Unfolding Story created a positive warmth and energy amongst the participants at the event, which is hard to recreate. There are four 'word clouds' interspersed throughout the report based on these responses, which convey something of that impact.

I've really valued...

combined · ability · struggle · openness · virtual · ethic · consistency · listening · action · working · communities · spirit · community · kindness · independent · building · people · information · able · value · air · work · efforts · Walking · colleagues · team · looking · Netflix · differently · local · new · ear · others · area · thought · collective · dogs · social · togetherness · fresh · helping · old · valued · teams · trust · councillors · better · relationships · sharing · family · humanity · connections · connecting · volunteers · networking · friends · groups · contacts · together · organisations · space · support · collaborative

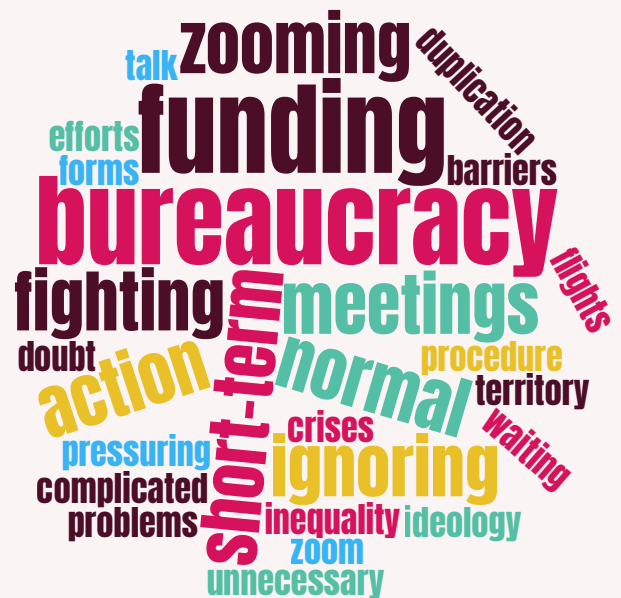## Key messages for moving to action

There was a clear and compelling drive amongst the event participants to maintain the momentum and build on the learning from the COVID-19 experience.

> *"Let's not lose the learning from this - so we don't go back to square one the next time something like this happens."*
> (Event participant)

The hope was that the event itself will have acted as a catalyst for continuing and locally or organisationally focused reflection, review and local action. This section includes a series of 'practice pointers' rooted in the key messages from the event that might support such a review.

Let's stop...

talk · zooming · duplication · efforts · funding · forms · barriers · bureaucracy · flights · fighting · meetings · doubt · action · short-term · normal · procedure · territory · pressuring · crises · ignoring · waiting · complicated · inequality · ideology · problems · zoom · unnecessary

A second phase of this research will support continuing local and national dialogue about what is needed to sustain and enhance connections and cross-sector working in response to COVID-19. With a strong focus on action and an eye on future mobilisation, it will continue the process of helping stakeholders put all practical elements into place for effective grassroots relationship. It will develop and test an online workshop model, to allow participants to digest and contextualise these research findings and provide a framework for participants to identify actions that they can take forward to develop and improve partnership activity on community resilience.

A distinction was made between immediate action that feels real and possible and longer-term actions to help structure the discussions and encourage people to explore their own response to the findings. Most immediately:

- **As lockdown and restrictions are ongoing, continuing and prevailing needs still need to be met.** For example, where care packages have been withdrawn for some vulnerable groups and where needs have been overlooked or people have fallen through the cracks in provision.

- **Listening and learning from communities remains essential.** Many mainstream services no longer have people on the ground; those people and agencies that are locally based are a crucial form of local intelligence and vital in creating effective, bespoke responses.

- **Bear witness to what works: this is an opportunity to celebrate the successful responses and build-on and continue to support these to be sustained.** Many local groups have done a fantastic job and there is scope to acknowledge and share these examples of 'good practice' and build on them in planning processes.

- **Resilience and recovery are an opportunity for the third sector to be seen and treated as equal partners, be given a stronger voice and a clear place at the table.** This would help shape policy, get support to those in need and ensure resources flow to where they are needed.

- **Digital exclusion remains a live issue.** There are still many gaps in IT provision and there is scope to be better at using a range of traditional and social media to engage communities.

- **Networks are a vital lifeline.** Bringing people together to connect is very useful; keep the connections going as we emerge from lockdown.

- **Systematic learning and reflection are needed.** This should be a joint endeavour across the voluntary and statutory sectors.

- **There is a need to raise the profile of the Voluntary and Community Sector Resilience Advisory Group.** There is a need to clarify the role of this group.

Implications for the next steps

The key actions raised above were explored in more detail and are set out here as implications which need to be considered in thinking about the next steps.

It's a bit radical but let's start…

Understanding need and response

- There is a need to take time to plan recovery and renewal so that the benefits of this experience are sustained and the opportunity it presents to continue to work differently is capitalised upon.

- Support for communities in non-emergency situations is an important part of the recovery picture and an opportunity to develop the good collaborative relationships essential in any emergency response. It will be helpful to make links with broader plans for recovery, for example, the work of the Social Renewal Advisory Board Plan, plans for supporting children in our communities and other key issues for recovery such as key issues rooted in inequalities such as job losses and poverty.[11]

- A 'proper needs assessment' in communities is needed, with statutory and third sector organisations involved, so that assets are recognised and developed to meet needs and prevent long-term harms to health and well-being, acknowledging that 'one size doesn't fit all'. For example, it will be important to capture the needs of BAME communities and to find ways to take account of issues of remoteness of rural communities.

Building relationships, partnerships and networks

- The third sector needs to get to know each other better. There is a need to make sure that the small, least powerful organisations that work at a very local level are included as well as larger, or more established ones. Small organisations should be encouraged to join networks wherever possible to share their experiences, knowledge, skills and unmet needs and help make better use of what is available.

- An expansion of the engagement between a wider cross-section of the voluntary and community sector and resilience partnerships is now essential. This is new territory for many of the voluntary or community groups that have been an essential part of the response to date. This works both ways; mutual awareness is beneficial for all parties and is an essential pre-requisite for effective and coordinated community responses.

- Community-level engagement with Community Planning Partnerships is already compromised by the COVID-19 realities which make face-to-face meetings very difficult, yet community is and needs to be seen as a key stakeholder. Continuing collaboration and communication will need to be realistic about the burden of partnership working, especially for small organisations that need much more support and resource to help them collaborate. They are likely to benefit from efforts to ensure that they 'don't use up energy on the red tape' and so be able to share expertise vital to policy and decision-making.

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11 **If not now, when? - Social Renewal Advisory Board report: January 2021 - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)**

Communication

- Sharing intelligence and knowledge of what is available between statutory and voluntary agencies is crucial and co-ordination of communications is needed to make sure information is timely and up to date.
- Accessible communication is needed, locally tailored and targeted, by and for each community, to encourage people to use existing provision. It will be important to work with communities to create and disseminate information. Digital inclusion is part of the response, but it is important to acknowledge that not everyone will want to or be able to be online.

Infrastructure and funding

- A good, well-resourced third sector infrastructure is needed. TSIs are well placed to support communities and could be used as a funding vehicle for local groups, making it easier for grassroots organisations to get funding and be part of networks without unduly complex procedures. Making core funding sustainable is a key issue.
- There needs to be improved understanding across the board of volunteering and exploration of how best to match volunteers with opportunities and reduce the time lag between people volunteering and taking up a role.
- Learning should explore barriers to collaboration within a local authority and between sectors, for example, finance structures and procurement, and seek ways to encourage collaboration. There is a chance to rethink risk and develop accountability based on trust and collaboration, impact and quality rather than scrutiny.

A role for the Voluntary and Community Sector Resilience Advisory Group

The event illustrated that the Voluntary and Community Sector Resilience Advisory Group (RAG) was not well known, or their role understood.

"There's a problem with what people don't know about structures, and how to engage with them."
(Event participant)

"If we don't know them – they don't know us! We need to know what they're about."
(Event participant)

There was interest in what the role of the RAG could be; potentially being a in a dual-facing place between public services and the voluntary and community sector, able to play a part in holding public services to account and keeping the voluntary and community sector informed and connected. A note of caution was sounded that whilst there may well be a place for national coordination of resilience responses and planning, it may also be the case that 'the landscape of coordination is already too cluttered'.

The discussions suggested there is interest in:

- Continuing to inform and inspire on-going collaboration with third sector and statutory sectors, including encouraging better collaboration between the bigger organisations to maximise impact and save resources.
- Helping to spread knowledge about what is happening in other areas, sharing good practice across Scotland and ideas of what works well.
- Supporting two-way intelligence sharing about what structures are in place and raising awareness for community groups of how to link with appropriate statutory forums.
- Enhancing understanding and promoting learning, particularly by ensuring that a thorough stocktake is done to prepare for the post-pandemic world and keeping momentum going so that the learning is not lost.
- Using the experience to inform the roles of other more established and trusted structures as well as highlighting any role for the voluntary and community sector RAG.
- Supporting the development of new forms of core funding and accountability arrangements.
- Facilitating small and medium sized groups to come together at local level, to hear, support and use those groupings as a collective.
- Paying attention to barriers to communication and collaboration.

Practice Pointers

These practice pointers reflect good thinking and practice arising from this research, deliberately written in affirmative language, 'as if' they were happening. They are intended to support group-based reflection on practice, to challenge, provoke and stretch thinking about existing ideas and practices. They can be explored by any organisation, whether a public service or a community council, individually or together; the 'we' in each statement can refer to whomever it is most appropriately applied at each time. The idea is to create a good environment for discussion, not a test or assessment of whether these conditions are met or are even seen as desirable. It is likely that sharing each statement will encourage a dialogue and raise many questions, appropriate for each group, on each occasion.

The pointers can be used in different ways to enable a learning focused discussion, for example: when you have an opportunity to bring people together to talk about practice, give them a chance to review the full set of pointers. Ideally, spread the full set out (best printed out in large font, one per page) over a large table and give people time to pick them up, mull over them and discuss informally as they go round.

If this is being done online, then the full set could be shared in advance or just before the discussion. In larger online groups, small breakout sessions are a good way to give people a chance to air their thoughts and queries, before any larger group discussion.

As time will usually be limited, participants could be asked to rank, prioritise, or select those that they wish to discuss, with others held over for another time. Discussion about even just one pointer is likely to generate ideas and issues to be taken forward.

1. We don't lose the learning: we bear witness to what works and learn from both success and failure.

2. We have a good sense of local needs.

3. We make it our business to know the people and organisations who are already doing so or might contribute to community resilience in the future.

4. We are only one expert amongst many. We know how we can best contribute to community resilience and emergency responses.

5. We are confident that we know what paperwork and protocols are important and ensure they are not an unnecessary burden.

6. We are all in this together: all partners have a strong voice, a clear place at the table and we value different perspectives.

7. We use a range of traditional and social media to engage with and communicate with other organisations and communities.

8. We work with care and seek to promote relationships and avoid damaging them in the course of our work.

6. Summary and conclusions

This research has contributed to a fuller understanding of how to support co-ordination across public, community and third sector organisations and the emerging range of COVID-19 focused community groups. There is more to do to fully engage public services in these developing discussions; their role will be critical in the realisation of the next steps identified as being of importance.

Understanding need and response

This research provides a useful picture of on the ground responses to COVID-19, largely from locally focused community and voluntary sector groups, involving many volunteers in their response. Notably just over half of organisations had not been involved in resilience work before.

Most of the examples highlighted food and related support initiatives such as delivering prescriptions directly to local people and providing other practical and emotional help. There has been a range of activities, many involving the logistics of the distribution of food and other essential supplies, use of volunteers or the redeployment of staff into emergency response roles, distribution and deployment of IT and support for those responding to COVID-19 workplace outbreaks or adaptation of their own ways of operating to meet the new challenges.

Building relationships, partnerships, and networks

The COVID-19 response has cemented local relationships and enabled the development of some newer ones, with a strong focus on the very local. New connections were most frequently made with networks of groups involved in emergency response work, and other networks and groups working at a community level. Despite this, it is important to note that not everyone felt so well connected or were not sought out in the way they might have expected. For some, there was disappointment in a lack of communication or leadership where it had been expected, for example, from elected councillors.

Connection and collaboration enabled organisations to play to their strengths, greater speed and frequency of practical collaboration, the ability to respond to the priorities of those most severely affected and a clear, shared purpose to galvanise efforts. Sharing of resources, pooling of data, and avoiding duplication of effort happened less frequently.

Developing new ways of working together

This research illustrates the widely valued 'ease and openness' with which people from different agencies have responded. There is a sense of 'doing the right thing', that barriers were being broken down, and that new possibilities for collaboration that might have seemed a stretch in the past, were now possible. People and organisations have shown themselves to be flexible, with a considerable 'can-do' proactive attitude and desire to go more than the extra mile to help others. Issues that had previously been barriers have been tackled and workarounds adopted.

The whole experience of the pandemic, including lockdown has been a period of rapid learning, creativity and adaptation as people have stepped outside the usual ways of working, and some are very aware of the shift in their mindset that this has created. It may be worth exploring how to sustain and maintain these valued 'new ways of working' in the next stage of this research.

The experience of COVID-19 has also accelerated trends or ideas that might previously have not gained traction in the same way, including a broader more holistic understanding of resilience that encompasses wellbeing, as well as emergency response.

Meeting the challenges

There have been challenges and some unresolved bigger policy or structural issues. Even so, immediate challenges shared here have generally been overcome and for some, have helped to strengthen relationships.

The kind of practical and relational challenges encountered include issues relating to PPE, keeping information up to date and issues of confidentiality. There has been duplicated support and clashes of meetings in some areas, exposing a need for better coordination. Funding was not always available. There were also many difficulties associated with working online, including unease or inability to use, or blockage of certain IT platforms and delays in finalising data-sharing agreements and purchasing devices. And there have been disputes, conflict, and fragmentation. Some ascribe this to tiredness, personality clashes and lack of support from outside. Some groups encountered resistance from established elected councillors and officials and difficulties in getting timely and relevant information from regional level agencies. For some people, these difficulties are an ongoing issue.

A future focus

The research has been an opportunity to test the resonance and relevance of the initial findings in the first months of 2021 and to discuss the implications for the future. It is positive that many people are very thoughtful about and focused on what the legacy of this experience will be at individual, organisational and partnership level, and express hopes for a different way of doing things in the future.

The report shows that whilst the pandemic response has been a period of rapid learning 'on the go' and there has been a lot of adaptation to services, most learning and review processes have been informal. There is now a need for systematic joint learning and reflection across the voluntary and statutory sectors. It is hoped that this research can contribute to such learning processes.

The role of the Voluntary and Community Sector Resilience Advisory Group is to act as a sounding board and conduit of information between the Scottish Resilience Partnership and the voluntary and community sector; as this role evolves, it will need to address questions of membership and what the 'slow time' and 'fast time' roles are for the group. In drawing this material together and valuing what has happened it is hoped that this will act as a catalyst for continuing local and national dialogue about what is needed to sustain and enhance connections and cross-sector working in response to COVID-19.

Annex 1: Stories of connection and collaboration

Story 1: Supplies to Orkney

As coordinator of the Northern Regional Resilience Partnership, in 'peacetime' my job is a kind of jack-of-all-trades, coordinating across the Category 2 responders and other supporting agencies, in the planning and preparation of response to significant incidents. I have to be diplomatic and know how to get the best out of people. Here in the Highlands and Islands a lot of people will wear several hats, so we rely very much on our good relationships. As a coordinator, when events happen, I might not know all the technical details, but I know the plans and who we need to respond, and can pull people together. Mostly the role is very outward facing, but it also includes being a conduit back to Scottish Government Ministers, to keep them up to date with what is happening.

Our Resilience Partnership would usually meet about four times a year. Earlier this year, we were meeting weekly, now it is about every 2-4 weeks. The Interim Chief Officer of the Orkney Islands Council told one of the strategic meetings that they were experiencing end-of-supply-chain issues with wholesale supplies of essential items. There were shortages and they were running out of some very basic provisions, even those that had been ordered and paid for. There were two Orkney-based wholesalers expressing concerns at their local emergency forum, who would normally supply the outer islands outwith the Orkney mainland, including some care homes. At that point you could not travel to Orkney mainland, so if the food wasn't coming to you, you were a bit stuck.

We were asked if there was anything we could do. We have a method to highlight these kinds of issues through various channels. And I set about trying to get hold of anybody within Government that could help. I pretty much stumbled across the CEO of the Food Standards Scotland and asked him to help me. I dived into a call with him with barely a preamble. He gave me a lot of time, insight, took on my concerns and pointed me in the direction of other people.

The Orkney wholesalers told me that the problems they were facing were that some of the big suppliers were focused on the quantities demanded by larger outlets and this was taking precedence over honouring smaller orders from Orkney. They also put me in touch with the CEO of the Scottish Wholesale Association, the trade association for wholesalers, and we had a lengthy discussion in which I was frank about my ignorance of these issues. I said, 'if I'm talking out of turn or treading on anyone's toes, keep me right!' There was a lot I learned about wholesale practices and logistics. He told me there were central belt wholesalers with stock they could not shift as it was originally intended for the hospitality industry.

So, we hatched a plan to get list of what the Orkney wholesalers wanted to try to marry up the two. We felt we must be able to figure this out! Really quickly, he obtained stock lists from wholesalers. There was one that had the right kind of stuff, even if it was in large quantities. We put them in touch with the Orkney wholesalers and left them to sort this out.

Logistics remained an issue. Elsewhere in government, lists had been compiled of offers of assistance. This was quite difficult to search and some offers weren't really viable, but I found a free offer of transport from Scottish National Opera and put them in touch with the wholesalers in Orkney. I'm afraid there isn't a big, shiny happy ending to this story: I don't know whether they ever actually did a delivery. I suspect that, in the end, they did not need to take up the offer. There are so many factors involved that I don't know about.

In all of this, I also discovered that the Scottish Government has an Islands Communities Team – we didn't previously know about each other and will now be making a point of finding out more about what we each do. I also found out that in parallel, a very helpful letter had gone out to suppliers from a Minister. This just added weight to the need for assurance that suppliers would honour commitments to deliver paid-for supplies, whatever the difficulties. I felt that all this raised bigger policy and legal issues, I was a bit frustrated that I was not able to pursue it at the time.

What I've really valued here is the ease and openness with which people from all agencies – both within and outwith Government, have responded. This may have always been there, and I've just never needed it? Our partnership working here is great, even with people you don't normally work with, but I was surprised at just how readily everybody was happy to talk to me, particularly given my ignorance. Really senior people within their fields of expertise took me seriously, no-one mocked me for what I did not know. They were gracious in how they responded, I never felt I was being humoured. They were all keen to help effect the change, they felt it wasn't acceptable, it wasn't right. Some of this happened over a period of a few days, such a short period of time. People just found time and did stuff, despite being really busy in their day jobs.

This is actually just my job! It is not so out of the ordinary, except that usually I'd be knocking on more local doors. I think this experience has given me confidence to think about what's the right thing to do, rather than being more mindful of 'my place', not wanting to step on toes.

Julie Jefferson

Story 2: Translation in a hurry

Normally as a local authority resilience officer, my contacts with the third sector would be through the multi-agency resilience partnership, which includes the Third Sector Interface.

In August 2020, there was a COVID-19 19 outbreak at a meat production factory in Coupar Angus involving 1200 people from multiple nationalities. The response was a real joint effort coordinated by the local resilience partnership.

The Army were involved in testing all the staff at the factory, issuing information about quarantine and so on. It was a pretty huge operation. We needed information about the tests and what to do afterwards translated into 17 different languages. And this had to be done really quickly. PKVAS, a small local charity, managed to do this in two days – that was huge. It was also decided to distribute food parcels. This was also quite a big undertaking in a short space of time. It seems to have been possible because they have the local contacts on the ground, local knowledge. This is where the voluntary sector really came into their own.

Keith Colville, Perth and Kinross

PKAVS Minority Communities Hub is the lead organisation supporting the expanding migrant population in Perth & Kinross. Whilst the Test and Protect information was translated by the Scottish Government, we were best able to help by plugging the gaps, particularly in issuing local information into the main languages of Polish, Romanian and Bulgarian. For example, guidance about getting a test and information simply telling people what was happening and about the need to stay at home. Some of this had to be updated very quickly when the guidance changed.

In terms of sending out information, we had access to a system that can issue mass text messages, which was useful too. We were also able to make good use of our social media and community contacts and set up a Helpline with extended hours. All this knowledge and our networks helped us give useful practical help to people from different communities without the English language skills to navigate the practical challenges of having to stay at home. In turn, it enabled us to give useful and confident insights to the partnership to help them understand more about cultural responses and attitudes.

Jenni Keenan, PKAVS Minority Communities Hub

Story 3: The Edinburgh Food Partnership

One of the things I'm most pleased about in response to COVID-19 is that the sense that 'we're all in this together' has broken down some barriers, there's less 'them' and 'us'. It was always there, but it has strengthened and opened a considerable number of doors in the corporate world. I don't think that Centrica would have previously thought of allowing their drivers and vans to deliver donations to charity groups. Now people are looking for reasons 'why', sweeping away all the old reasons 'why not', and saying, 'you know what, we can….'

I get a great buzz out of things like LNER donating their catering for trains, redirecting sandwiches and food to charities. This has been part of the Edinburgh Food Partnership, based on the Nat West site at Gogarburn, which is essentially a big, easily accessible but mothballed conference centre, staffed 24/7 by G4S, a security company.

The initiative pulled in other businesses from nearby, including KPMG and Deloitte, and then reached out to some of the bigger charities that were operating in the area, that became a triumvirate of Business in the Community, Social Bite and FareShare (Cyrenians).

Since then, we've been dealing with requests coming in from other charities known to us, and we use the site to take delivery of, warehouse and redistribute donations from businesses. Everyone involved is really committed to it. We're all trying to make it work, and it works brilliantly. We've been able to overcome issues because we have such open and honest conversations.

As well as the LNER sandwiches and other food, we have also distributed 15,000 garments from Marks and Spencer's, about 12,000 new books, predominantly children's books, to charities that support families. We have some 40,000 face coverings that we're busy distributing to frontline charities. The great thing is that this started with a nice simple and vital issue, food, and because we've created the collaboration, we've realised we can use it for all sorts of things. Food banks don't just need food.

The G4S staff are involved in the warehouse, managing deliveries and parcelling donations ready for delivery. Sometimes you get more than you were expecting, or less, and we have found ways to sort all this out fairly between us. Our delivery networks use vans from Nat West and G4S's own vans, Social Bite, FareShare, Centrica and Business Stream. Between us all, we've managed to get everything that comes in, back out again to the front line. The number of charities involved now must be into three figures, all benefiting from donations through Gogarburn.

We expect to be able to use the site until at least March 2021. My hope is that something along these lines will continue – that somewhere in the central belt of Scotland, there is a substantial site that can be freed up as more people continue to work from home. I hope this work is a permanent legacy of the pandemic, part of ongoing Corporate Social Responsibility. I am confident about that because I think people have realised their world will not implode if they ignore some of their previous stringencies and rules; that it is possible to be a bit more flexible, a bit more 'can-do', rather than give reasons 'why not'. Companies have given away a load of products and are still alright.

John Riddell, Connections Manager, Business in the Community

Story 4: Getting technology to those that need it

Having to move services to virtual delivery has been a real challenge for some charities. I'm in contact with a domestic abuse charity that supports victims and perpetrators, who have had to move their face-to-face services on-line. This has been only partially successful. As well as the loss of the human interaction, there have also been issues that people using the service didn't necessarily have the technology to be online or weren't necessarily tech-savvy. We asked for more to be done to get technology to those people, to help them get online, understand how Teams or Zoom works, understand how to keep things confidential if they share a laptop and so on.

Some donated laptops and devices were available through a Scottish Government initiative. Whilst they did well to give out a lot of Chromebooks and so on, a lot of people that really needed them were missed out of the criteria. We were frustrated that one of the criteria was that if there is a device in the house, you don't qualify. Of course, if a single device is controlled by the perpetrator of domestic abuse, it might as well not be there. The latest round of equipment being given out went to care leavers under 26 years old and households with school-age children that didn't have a device.

I understand that we should target the school children and care leavers, but I'd like there to be an organisation that people could apply to make a case for this kind of support, a channel for discretion to be exercised. There are plenty of volunteers in Scotland that could provide support with the technical side of getting online. Old fashioned dongles are a simple solution if there's no Wi-fi. Data packages have been an issue sometimes, not as much as the lack of hardware.

John Riddell, Connections Manager, Business in the Community

Story 5: Collaboration across Lochalsh

Kyle & Lochalsh Community Trust (KLCT) is one of the many community organisations and Trusts in the Lochalsh area of Wester Ross. Historically KLCT were involved in projects based in Kyle, the largest community, although we have always viewed the Trust as a Lochalsh-wide organisation. Before the pandemic, we wanted to carry out a consultation across the whole of Lochalsh to find out what the issues were and whether KLCT could work with other groups and organisations to resolve some of the issues. We were fortunate to get support from the Scottish Community Development Centre for our proposal and to help set up a series of meetings with representatives of the seven community councils in Lochalsh and other voluntary groups in the area. This grouping became known as the 'Lochalsh Collaboration' and began working on a questionnaire to circulate throughout Lochalsh. We made a successful application to the Scottish Government's Investing in Communities programme for funding to employ a development officer and to cover the costs of our extensive consultation. Our Community Development Officer started in April 2020, by which time KLCT was heavily involved in the Lochalsh Community Response to the COVID-19 pandemic. She was diverted to working on the COVID-19 response, so the consultation was put on hold.

I'm really pleased at how well KLCT and the Lochalsh Collaboration rose to the challenge of a new focus, which had to be the response to COVID-19. And because we already had a relationship with Highlands and Islands Enterprise, we were able to put together a package of response to the situation and quickly access Scottish Government funding.

On the ground, it was pleasing that the response to COVID-19 was a lot of spontaneous volunteering, where people helped their neighbours with their shopping or collected their prescriptions or generally just made sure they were OK. Everyone wanted to make sure that vulnerable people in their community were looked after. The feeling was that in each of the seven Lochalsh areas there was a huge amount of local knowledge, which meant that volunteers there knew exactly what was needed.

The Trust felt that our role would be best served by trying to coordinate that voluntary activity. The established trust amongst the existing Lochalsh Collaboration members proved to be a strong base, making it easier to launch our community-wide response.

A great example of our collaboration in action has been the newsletter. When the West Highland Free Press decided not to publish the local newspaper, we filled the gap by issuing a newsletter to keep people up to date, give information about where they could get advice and so on. The first one was hand delivered by volunteers to every household, about 1,600 in total. It has been really popular; we've had a lot of good feedback and great contributions from people all over the area.

We also set up our own Telephone Helpline and a Food Voucher scheme, both run by volunteers, and publicised in the newsletter. Another initiative saw us taking over the redistribution of surplus food from the Coop, which the Local Youth Trust had previously used in cooking lessons. This food was made available in the local blessings box, or outside the village hall. More recently this has become much more organised as a Community Fridge, where people are asked to 'take what you need, leave what you can'. We have found that emphasising the benefits of reducing food waste encourages people to use the scheme.

After the lockdown was ended and things slowly began to return to some degree of normal business, the Lochalsh Collaboration was able to turn once again to the consultation. The newsletter took on more significance because we were able to use it to let people know about the consultation. It kind of prepared the ground and following some really detailed community profiling done by volunteers, we now have a good basis to launch the questionnaire, which we're planning to post out with the January 2021 edition.

I think the newsletter will carry on, certainly for the foreseeable future as we have funding that should see us through until March 2021. By then we should know what the issues are in each of the communities and if there's anything that can be done at a Lochalsh-wide level. At the end of the process each of the seven community council areas will have their own local plan and there will be an overall plan for Lochalsh. This will feed into the Locality Plan of the Community Planning Partnership, which we've now been invited to become involved in. Another important legacy is that now we have many more volunteers, although I'm not actually sure how many!

Along the way, there were things we thought we could do that proved difficult. We talked a lot about whether we could have a Meals-on-Wheels service to deliver hot meals. Whilst this has happened in other areas, we didn't have any offers to provide the food, so it's not a practical possibility.

It has been quite a long haul and it is not over yet. One of the supportive things was that we were already quite closely involved with the Skye & Lochalsh Council for Voluntary organisations, the Third Sector Interface. They've been very supportive and helpful, they share ideas with us, and we've been able to sense check things with them, on both the COVID-19 response and the Consultation. That is a really useful collaboration; it's an existing relationship, but it's got stronger. I think it is interesting that, despite the challenges, or maybe even because of the challenges, these links and connections have got stronger.

Pam Noble, Treasurer and former Chair.

Story 6: I just said yes!

My involvement in the Council response to COVID-19 was not my normal job. Usually, I work in Community Empowerment Services for Glasgow City Council. I'm the Principal Officer for Equalities and I manage two small teams of community development and community engagement officers.

My team was asked to help with doing some calls to people who were on the shielding list, initially issued by the Scottish Government and later added to by the Health and Social Care Partnership. People with certain health conditions had been sent a letter to ask them to call a number if they needed help such as getting prescriptions, medicine or food. There were many thousands of people in this position in Glasgow. People were entitled to weekly food parcels, topped up by a fresh food parcel from Council, but gremlins and hiccups in the system meant that this could take some time to come through. We were calling people to see if they needed food while they were waiting.

I was asked by our Head of Financial Inclusion Services, to help out and I just said, 'yes, that's fine – we'll do it!' In the beginning there was no system, they were delivering this on the hoof. There were so many people that did not have anyone that can bring them things. People needed food immediately. It was good to be able to help, not least as a lot of our core business had ceased at that time.

It was chaotic initially because everybody was learning as they went along. We needed to keep people with food until their weekly parcels started arriving, but there was no one place where we could go to get all this sorted. There was eight of us, phoning people up, trying to find out if they had anything in the house, just dealing with the emergency food element of it. We rang food banks, many were brilliant, but initially they were not set up to be able to take food to people.

Eventually we simplified this by making the Red Cross the main source of food parcels. We got ourselves more organised. I started doing a spreadsheet to keep track of who was doing what. And we brought in more people from the wider service to help.

The key thing about this was the relationship between the Council and the Red Cross. You knew, if you had called somebody, that they were sitting there without food. The Red Cross were very good at going out at all hours. Some of my team would sometimes just go and take someone a parcel if they were near and it was out of hours. Everyone that was working on this went above and beyond.

All the time there were challenges. Things kept going wrong, just because people were inventing things on the hoof to deal with the scale of the problem. But there was very much a 'can do' attitude from most people. Councils can be horrendously bureaucratic, which can slow things right down. In this situation it wasn't like that; I think some of that's due to my colleague who would be just like 'make it happen, make it happen!'

And my team just went at it. It was quite exhausting, because you were talking to people on the phone who were in need and were sometimes upset. But you felt like you were doing something that was making a difference in life. Some people we came across were extremely vulnerable. Sometimes we had to suspend the rules a little it to help people out without going through all the protocols.

I'm glad we did that. It has refreshed our ideas and given us more confidence. It has led to us having a stronger team ethic and a clearer focus on the idea that we could be doing more of our usual community engagement like this. Doing those calls made us realise we could be more proactive in just talking to citizens ourselves. We found that people may be quite enjoyed it, there's a certain intimacy about it. Phoning people is easy, nobody needs any technological expertise - the staff or the citizen.

It has shaped the work that is happening going forward. We've just done about 70 phone calls with people as part of 'community conversations' happening for the Scottish Government Social Renewal Advisory Board. It was all quite last minute, but we were able to use community contacts, some people from the shielding list and people contacted through a Facebook page. We're now planning a similar exercise with Glasgow Life for January 2021. We do want to go back to face-to-face community engagement, but this feels like something we will want to sustain.

Judith Hunter

Story 7: Learning from the pandemic

My job is to listen to people and act upon their wishes. I am a Community Connector, employed by Govanhill Community Development Trust in a post funded by Glasgow City Council and the NHS. Govanhill is Scotland's most diverse neighbourhood, and I speak a number of community languages, which is vital for me to understand what is happening on the ground.

During the initial COVID-19 lockdown, I found myself right in the middle of it. However, there has been a silver lining: my work of connecting organisations and the community has never been easier. When the crisis started, all the politics were left behind, there was a lot of good will, and nobody had any second thoughts about collaborating.

In these times of crisis, the staff who do on-the-ground work were able to have their say, collaborate, and get inspired by each other's ideas. These staff were key to understanding how the people of Govanhill were reacting, as they know their communities best. Everybody was in chaos and overworked, so we needed each other to withstand this collective trauma. The expertise of staff is more valued now because of COVID-19; in a crisis, you can't ignore it. That's why it's so important to allow staff to have more agency - it's essential to making organisations more effective.

Because of lockdown, it's crucial that people know where to find help. For the first time, we created a printed directory of Govanhill services. We designed it in a way that is accessible to people who can't read or write. It shows you what kind of help is provided using symbols, and provides phone numbers. We delivered physical copies of the directory to over 8000 households in Govanhill.

While printed resources are vital, we also discovered an online approach that actually works in Govanhill, even for the people who are normally perceived as facing huge barriers to participation because of their limited language or literacy skills. Lots of people are online, and it's possible to be engaged online if you are illiterate - you just engage differently and rely on videos, voice messages, and visuals, so we focused on these communication methods.

Digital inclusion was a key focus for us during the pandemic. However, it was not just a case of giving people devices and data. We learned that the most important thing was to provide training and make sure people committed to it. Family dynamics were also a factor - you might get a device but still stay excluded, for example, if you've given it to your child.

Lockdown was a period of learning for us. If you're working remotely, people expect you to be available day and night. We also learned that people go with the same issues to staff across different organisations, so three or four organisations might be dealing with the same inquiry. We knew this was happening before, but not the scale of it. Better connections across organisations allow us to avoid duplication.

To collaborate with multiple organisations, I started using Google Docs to share documents with the data protection agreement covering what we do and don't share. This is now a tool for every single support worker in the area, with meeting minutes and action points. Staff have been able to share their insights and people can contact each other for advice across different organisations. I think transparency is key, and a shared document is very convenient as people can contribute in their own time.

COVID-19 made us focus on true inclusion on every level. It's all about access to information, keeping people informed, and breaking the barriers to communication. Having staff speaking people's languages changes everything; it determines whether people engage with a service and how. The right staff can make everybody feel welcome and secure. We also ensure that our design is accessible, for example for people with dyslexia or limited literacy. We're still learning to be truly inclusive, for example, by incorporating sign-language interpreting or captioning at events.

Part of my role is to write a Locality Plan for Govanhill, based on residents' needs and wishes. I strive to do it in a way that truly engages with the community and keeps people informed at every stage. I want this plan to be useful to people who are trying to make a difference in their neighbourhood. I also want it to be available in different formats for different needs. When we release the Locality Plan, I will make sure it goes to every single household in Govanhill. It's a no-brainer to do it this way, but I don't think I would have thought about it in the same way before COVID-19.

I'm lucky to be in Govanhill at a time of such a huge change. Our COVID-19 experience makes me more hopeful that our bigger ambitions for regeneration will become possible through collaboration. Lots of organisations are doing excellent work and everybody wants to be recognised for their efforts; if we communicate and collaborate, we can make it better, like we've been doing during COVID-19.

Marzanna Antoniak

Story 8: Thinking more broadly about resilience

I am the CO of the Highland Third Sector Interface. As a TSI our response to Covid included publishing a new Covid-focused website and a series of quick guides. For example, if you were a brand new 'pop-up' organisation you could check you were doing that appropriately and where to get information and guidance. We issued a Community Action Register and continued to maintain a volunteering register. We set up a Helpline for third sector organisations and were able to make free e-learning available with funding from the Scottish Government. This covers a range of issues such as safeguarding, food hygiene, return to work, Covid health and safety, coping with change and there has been good interest in these. We also commissioned a series of videos to help organisations address the issue of death in the workplace.

Whilst I'm pleased about all of this, the best legacy will be enduring changes to how we think about resilience. In the past, people may have talked about resilience, but what they meant was the village has been flooded and we need to deploy first responders to get people out of their homes, then we deal with the flood. Covid was quite a different type of response, as much about food shortages, isolation, loneliness and so on, and as things have gone on, the concept of resilience has had to change. It is now as much about mental ill health as giving CPR to somebody who's been in a car accident.

Before Covid, we had been having conversations about the need to establish a third sector resilience network. We wanted to think about resilience more broadly to include everything from sudden death, to suicides, through to power outages, extreme weather conditions, environmental disasters, as well as pandemics. Previous third sector involvement in resilience planning has tended focus on organisations like Red Cross or Street Pastors, when in fact, there's 100's, if not 1000's, more organisations, who could contribute too.

A third sector resilience network would allow the TSI to support the organisational health checks and a range of organisations to make sure governance was in the place, and that policies and procedures are all healthy. The public sector could then come in to support them to make sure they have resilience plans which work across the likely response types. Then they will be ready to go, with all the plans, relationships and structures in place.

Whilst we were talking about this back in January 2020, I would have got absolutely nowhere, or nowhere fast, until Covid hit. It is almost as if the stock value of the Third Sector went up overnight.

People who had previously involved the most obvious groups in resilience planning, groups who have contributed well over the years and seen them through, have now realised more organisations could contribute. Without Covid, I can't see that we would have been able to have got this done for the next 5 years. We are now in the process of recruiting a new development officer specifically to jump start that process. The resilience planning processes are really supportive, its opened doors for more collaboration.

We know from potential funders of the third sector that this will help them invest. They see it as an indication that organisations have been through some form of quality consideration and that they are working collaboratively with people. I hope that the fact that we have potential funders and the public sector involved, will mean that the third sector will take it more seriously itself.

The 'resilience world' has been a closed-off world. It's as if it's been the way it is, because it's always been that way, and it hasn't been challenged to think about resilience in a different type of way, until now. Establishing a network will help us to make sure we better understand the nature of the Covid response, identify the positives, sustain them where appropriate, and learn from the other things that maybe were not quite as positive. We might also do a health-check on some of the pre-existing practices, so we know what is valuable and necessary and what's not. It would be fair to say that not all of it was there for the sake of being there, but we need to understand this better.

Mhairi Wylie

Story 9: Adapting our support to flood risk communities

The Scottish Flood Forum (SFF) is an independent charity that supports communities at risk of flooding to recover and build better flood resilience. During the pandemic, we were concerned about the ability of flood risk communities to respond to flooding. One example of this was implementing our community flood alerting projects during the pandemic alongside RiverTrack Ltd. We offered remote engagement over Zoom, on site sensor installation and we posted out sanitised equipment to households, with further online meetings to go through teething problems, get the system operational and work with the community to produce a flood resilience plan.

In May 2020, we undertook a survey to identify the impact of COVID-19 on community resilience to flooding and reached about 70 community organisations across Scotland. We wanted to know more about the support needed for community groups to prepare and respond to flooding both during the lockdown and in the future.

One finding was that many volunteers were in the shielding category, so would be unable to respond. The survey also highlighted that there was a lack of formal guidance around communities activating during the pandemic and a lack of PPE in the early stages. Now the SFF have supported communities to implement new COVID-19 risk assessments for their community emergency plans, so they can continue to operate in response to flooding.

At the time the survey went out we were experiencing a long period of time without rain, some people in the survey thought that the risk of flooding was low. However, unsurprisingly several communities were flooded in August 2020. It was clear that those communities that were able to respond were those that had a community flood plan in place. They reported a very different post flooding community feeling and less damages to those without a plan. One community flood volunteer stated:

"Over the weekend we had an all-too-common occurrence, the Burn jumped its banks. But this time, the ending to the story was very different. Owing to months of planning, collaboration, and the development of real information and partnerships between our Community Support Group, Scottish Flood Forum, Council, River Track, and the many volunteers and first responders -- this time the problem was anticipated and then contained. The silt management program helped. The teams of volunteers who knew what to do helped. The provision and timely deployment of flood protection equipment before the flood helped. When I walked around the town on Sunday,

the feel and mood of the town was completely different to that after the past few flooding events. People felt that they had been active and cooperative and there was an understanding that a lot of people made this a much more positive event, we made a difference!"

When there is flooding, we switch from planning and preparation to recovery mode. We were able to coordinate with local authorities using our recovery vehicle "Flo".

This involved socially distanced visits to Flo, so that people could get immediate advice about recovering from flooding, such as dealing with insurance, drying properties, and just coping with the aftermath. We very quickly realised that due to widespread flooding and staff shortages, we needed to switch to digital recovery sessions to increase our reach to flooded communities.

We've seen the emergence of 7-10 new community organisations, growing from flooded communities and we're now supporting them remotely to develop as flood resilient communities, to put in place structures for them, think about their governance, attract new volunteers, to move forward and be better prepared for flooding.

Paul Laidlaw

Story 10: More than food

The Evangelical Alliance is a UK-wide coalition of churches and Christian charitable organisations. When lockdown began, The Vine Church in Dunfermline saw a need in the community to create a project aiming to provide 100 meals a day, seven days a week, ensuring that no one would have to go without a good meal every day. This project has been included in a Stories of Hope report[12], produced by the Evangelical Alliance and Serve Scotland, which has shown how the Church has been an essential player in the pandemic.

In Dunfermline, twenty-five volunteers from both the church and the wider community, gave their time throughout lockdown. The church received referrals from various community groups in the local area, as well as from headteachers, social workers, the local addiction service, criminal justice and social work units and various youth projects. This collaboration amongst agencies on the ground, meant they were able to reach the most vulnerable in the area, maximising the impact and number of people who were able to receive support. The beneficiaries have included people who have been shielding, young carers and isolated pensioners. There is no doubt that without this help and support from the Church there would be more extremely vulnerable individuals struggling just to have one meal per day.

A particularly interesting part of the picture is that the criminal justice social work team have been distributing these meals to some of their most vulnerable service users. They have told us that providing at least one hot meal per day has been a really vital service, especially as some people are not eligible for any other support. This novel way of doing things also has the benefit for the social workers of enabling contact with people to ensure their safety and welfare. This might mean being able to put in place any additional and necessary supports, such as arranging health appointments, ensuring people are collecting and taking regular medications and supporting those who have addiction issues. An added benefit is that the social workers have sometimes met the children and families of their service users, which they would not usually do, and this them gives insight into their home circumstances as well as providing support for the whole family. The feedback has been positive, suggesting that people like the contact and that the meals service make them feel part of 'something' within their own communities.

There are more mutual benefits as the social work staff work alongside the church, sharing information about other agencies and between them, creating greater awareness and support, which in turn, can benefit everyone. Food insecurity is obviously an ongoing issue, but this example shows just what can be organised from within a community.

Kieran Turner

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12 Stories of Hope Scotland – Evangelical Alliance (**eauk.org**)

Annex 2: Selected survey charts

Figure 2: Usefulness of connections in a practical sense

Legend: Most or all of the time | Some of the time | Too varied to say | Hardly ever or not at all | Not applicable
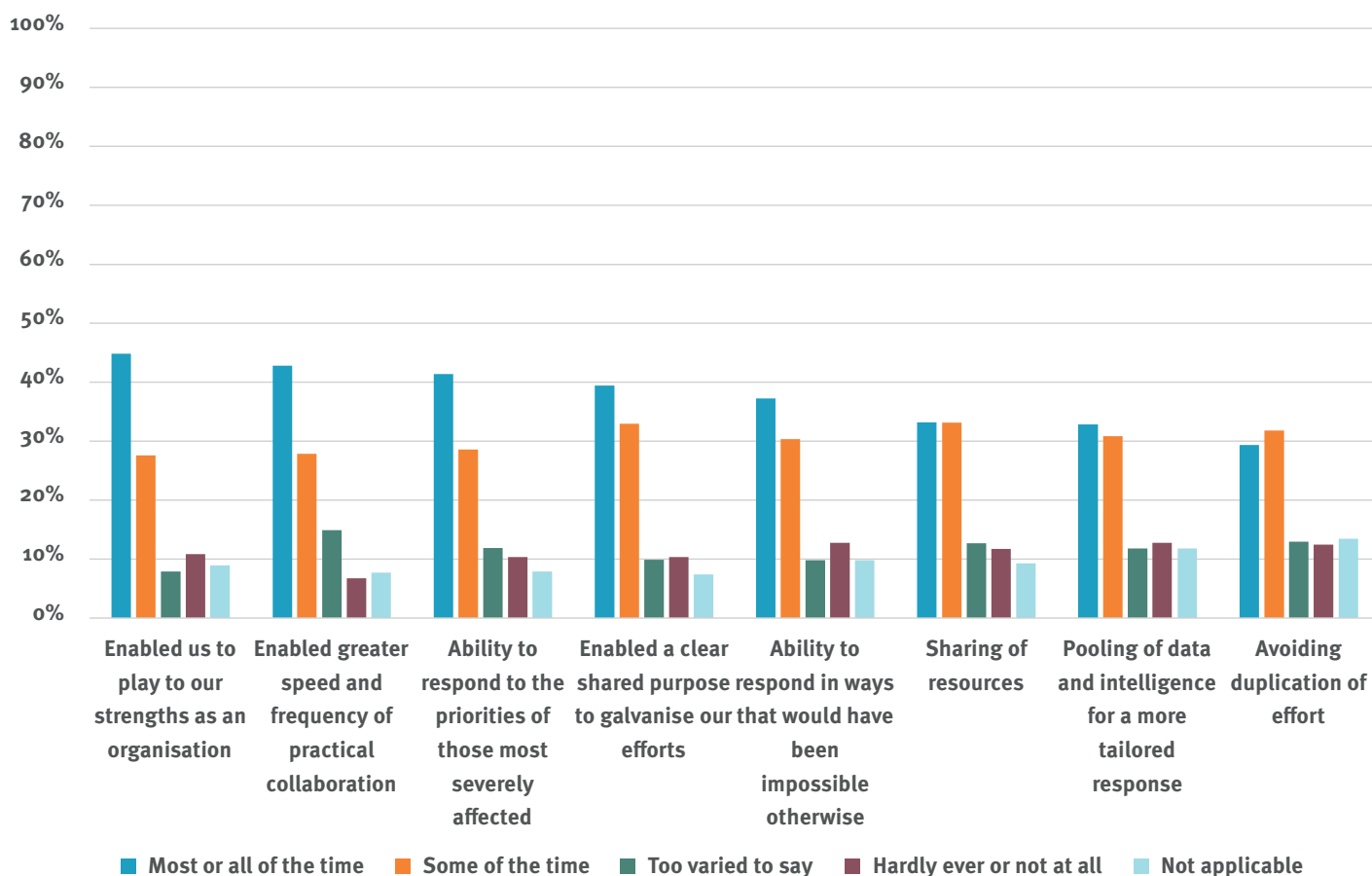
Figure 3a: The factors that have influenced practical collaboration

Legend: Most or all of the time | Some of the time | Too varied to say | Hardly ever or not at all
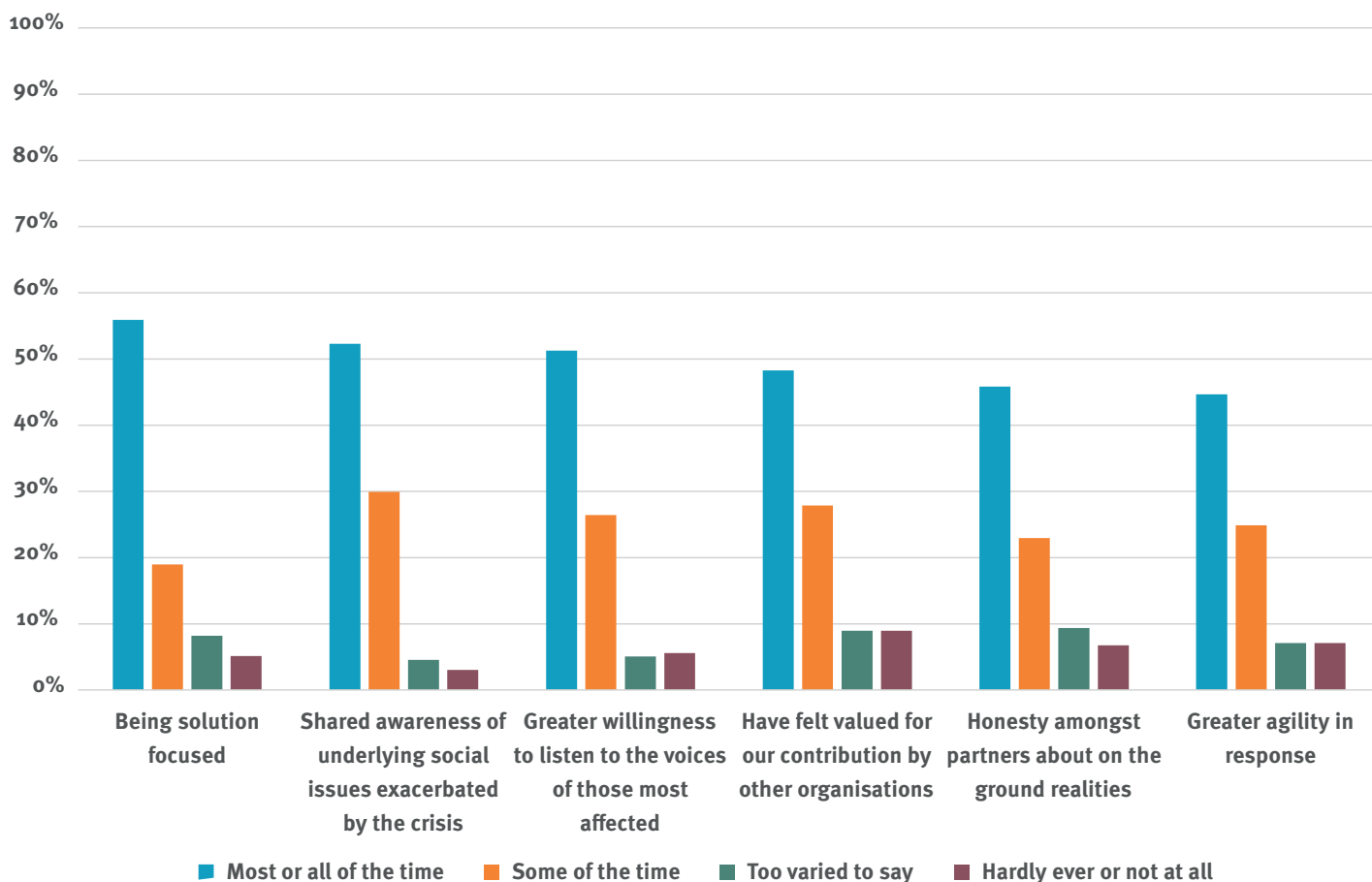
Figure 3b: The factors that have influenced practical collaboration

Legend:
- Most or all of the time
- Some of the time
- Too varied to say
- Hardly ever or not at all
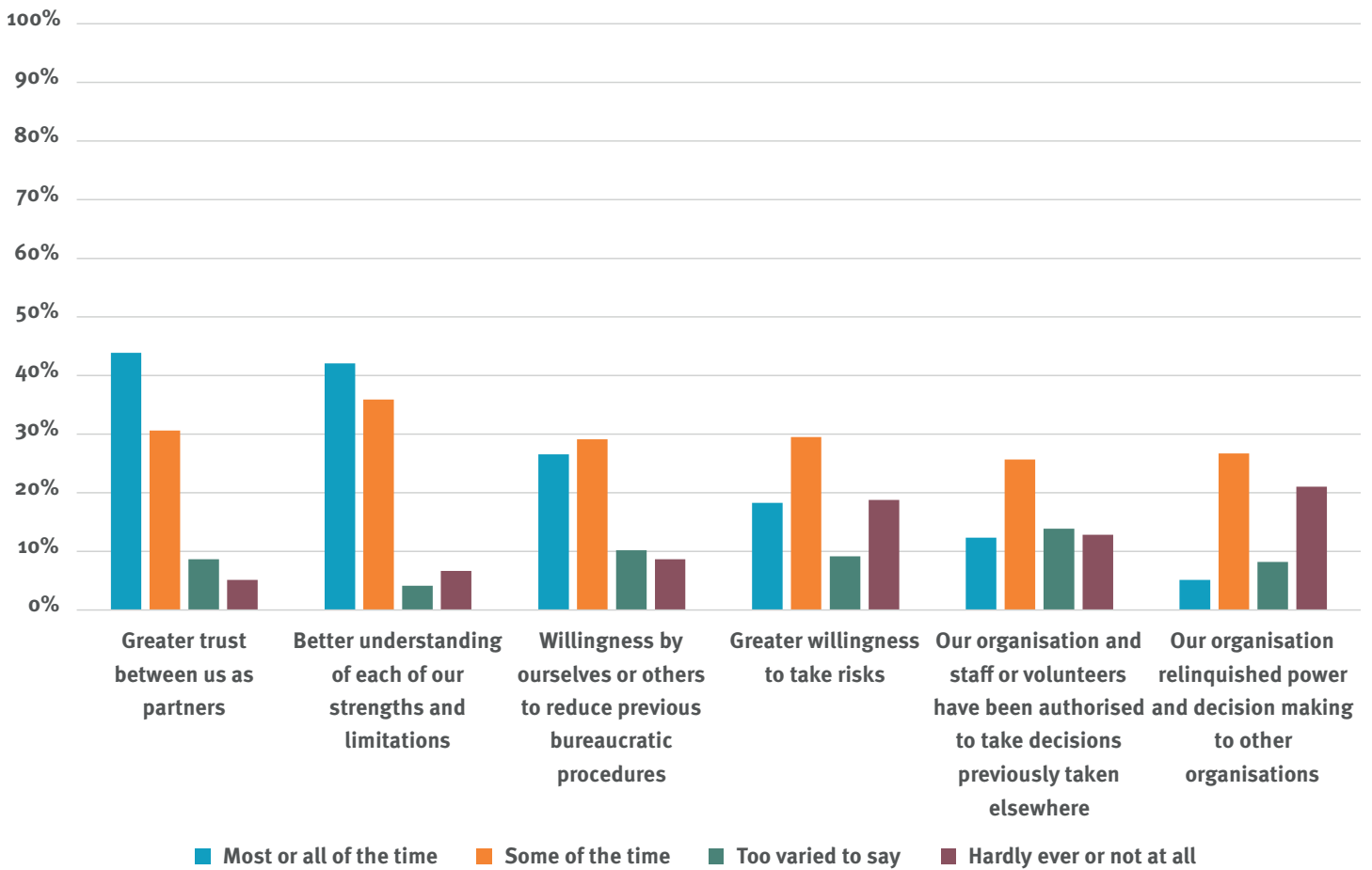
Annex 3: Research objectives

Specific objectives are to:

1. Learn from the multiple stakeholders involved in all parts of the COVID-19 response including emergency planning responses.

2. Understand how to support co-ordination across public, community and third sector organisations and the emerging range of COVID-19 focused community groups.

3. Explore operational connections which work well or need to be strengthened for the purpose of providing aid such as food, medicines and other forms of social support.

4. Explore what amplifies or inhibits effective outcomes and processes, with particular regard to:
   - information flows between sectors about who is doing what.
   - effective signposting to all relevant services for those who need help.
   - the impact of partnership working between sectors on the targeting and impact of COVID-19 support and aid.
   - efficient use of available resources avoiding duplication of effort and adding value where possible.

5. Explore the practice aspects of operational systems and relationships, highlighting good practices and challenging issues.

6. Identify practical lessons for communities, agencies, volunteers, community planning partners and those specifically engaged in emergency planning responses.

7. Highlight any more general lessons that can be shared with other emergency response and resilience partners to inform whether community resilience measure can be improved and better linked with community planning or other forms of local community action.