

# How a Statutory Organisation Adapted During the COVID-19 Crisis

September 2020

By working with our colleagues in the Voluntary and Community sector, we have a series of reports on our website that capture the experiences and issues from the point of view of services and groups that support local people in the community.

This is an independent case study showing an example of one element of a large statutory organisation's story of adapting and what the future holds.

## About the organisation



The Partnerships and Communities team are part of the Communities Directorate at WSCC, the directorate were responsible for the development of the COVID-19 Community Hub to support the most vulnerable residents in the County.



*Our team works in each district and borough area to implement the County Council's five core priorities and actively promote the nationally endorsed Five Ways to Wellbeing. We provide a place-based focus working in partnership.*

Pete Lawrence, Partnership Area Manager



## What were the immediate challenges?

West Sussex County Council services changed due to COVID-19 many work streams were put on hold as the Council created a Community Hub to support the most vulnerable. A database was set-up of how the voluntary and community sector (VCS) were reaching out to local people. This was set-up on the West Sussex County Council library computer system and supported the hub in directing residents to appropriate support.

Staff from the Communities Directorate were already engaged in delivering food and medications and providing welfare calls to those on the Government *shielding list*. The districts and borough councils also responded positively with some providing a local hub model and others setting up teams to support the WSCC Community Hub.

The *Community Hub* was set up to concentrate on those who were shielding but this grew wider over time with no request for urgent support refused. Initially, they were responding mainly with emergency food parcels and medication requests plus a range of different welfare issues.



Our Directorate completely changed, and staff were placed into new roles.

We began to receive a high volume of calls for the Community Hub as we were trying to set-up. The Community Hub was a request from the Government for those shielding and at the highest risk, to support with food parcels, access to medication and other welfare issues. We had hundreds of requests in the early days.

It was quite amazing as we gathered intelligence on how the community were reacting to the crisis, Parish and Town Councils, voluntary and community groups and even new COVID-19 mutual aid groups.



When they first started to create the Community Hub activities needed to be joined up *as there was a huge local reaction and activity needed to be coordinated*. The local community response was quick and effective and now have linked with the Community Hub via online and telephone.

The Community Hub set-up a referral process and the districts and boroughs linked in. The Hub was able to refer residents to local solutions via the districts and boroughs and VCS allowed the Hub to concentrate on the most vulnerable.

West Sussex County Council responded to anything that was, or is considered an emergency with food provision and medication solutions provided on the same day or next.

## How have you worked with the Voluntary and Community Sector to address key areas?

COVID-19 has exacerbated certain issues, nationally, there is a reported increase in domestic violence and mental health issues as well as bereavement - as sadly people are dying from COVID-19. For example; if someone has expressed a need to talk to someone then they would be referred to MIND West Sussex who is also on the steering group for bereavement. If a call is received for domestic violence this would be forwarded to the Police and/or VCS.

Mental health issues will be a clear concern and part of the recovery planning as it is understood the pressures related to the crisis and having to stay and work at home will affect a lot of people.



There has been a strong community response, and an example of this in my patch is Selsey where the coordinated community Mutual Aid group were amazing at supporting a wealth of local issues and needs.



## What have been the strengths of the VCS during COVID-19?

The VCS reacted quickly to the crisis and changing their normal services from face-to-face to telephone and virtual to enable support to continue. There are many examples of voluntary and community organisations pulling together and the Community Hub being able to refer into these. Many new community groups were created because of the crisis and have been a great help as have the COVID-19 Mutual Aid Facebook groups. It has been a combined effort between the County Council, NHS, Districts and Boroughs, Parish Councils and the VCS, it makes you proud as a professional but also as a person.

Arun and Chichester Council have worked with Voluntary Action Arun and Chichester to bring in the wider perspective of the VCS to support. We have regular conversations with Citizens Advice Arun & Chichester, Carers Support West Sussex to ensure all gaps are being identified and supported. We have a good combined picture of what is needed going forward during the recovery phase.

The strengths of the VCS are that they have worked well together for example Stonepillow had a surplus of bread and cheese and this was delivered to people in need using a local community organisation, ensuring the food wasn't wasted and met the needs of local families. They rang up and informed us of the situation and we linked them with others so that the focus was on people. A number of organisations have worked well together but COVID-19 has bought a new level of partnership working that will work with going forward.



A massive strength of the VCS is responding to the needs of individuals. Organisations have pulled together for the common good and been innovative and creative. Now there needs to be *more creativeness in future voluntary sector provision*.



I guess the world is a new place going forward and we need to work in partnership and pool our resources to ensure there are sustainable solutions. Through the Health and Wellbeing Board there is an opportunity to create new strands of work and integrate services to support health and wellbeing partnerships, which is our ambition. However, we will need loads of important conversations to achieve this.



## Recovery where do you start?

So much has happened during COVID-19 and although the pandemic isn't over there is a need to begin recovery planning, taking what has worked well and putting the needs of communities at the heart of partnership working.

Everyone needs to be clear as to what is happening, what are the priority areas and what each organisation can contribute. It is about returning to business as usual but looking at how the learnings from COVID-19 can improve strategic and partnership approaches, despite the tragic nature of the pandemic from a professional perspective it is an exciting time to work in local government and be part of whatever the new world looks like.



I am proud of everything we have achieved so far, there are exciting times to come as we develop better more sustainable ways of working together.



## Contact details

To learn more about West Sussex County Council Partnerships and Communities Team, you can contact Pete at [Peter.Lawrence@westsussex.gov.uk](mailto:Peter.Lawrence@westsussex.gov.uk)

visit their webpage <https://www.westsussex.gov.uk/leisure-recreation-and-community/supporting-local-communities/community-guidance-and-help/>



# Voluntary Action Arun and Chichester

Our role is to enable, support and promote VCS groups across Arun and Chichester.

- Support for Member Organisations. Please contact us by downloading our referral form from our [website](#) or emailing [lucie.maldoom@vaac.org.uk](mailto:lucie.maldoom@vaac.org.uk)
- We provide a Funding monthly e-newsletter, and our funding surgeries via zoom.
- We provide regular Networking and Training Events, see our e-bulletins and website for details.
- Our e-bulletin provides the latest information for the VCS.
- Volunteers - if you would like to advertise for volunteers please get in touch with [Jenny.holmes@vaac.org.uk](mailto:Jenny.holmes@vaac.org.uk) or go to our website to upload your information. <https://www.vaac.org.uk/volunteering>

**Website:** [www.vaac.org.uk](http://www.vaac.org.uk)

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We have a simple ambition at Healthwatch West Sussex...  
to make local health and social care services better for  
people that use them.



We are here to listen, take action and influence positive change for local people  
living in West Sussex.

We record what people tell us and share this anonymously with those who make  
decisions about our health and care services.

**You can contact us in several ways:**



Telephone - 0300 012 0122



Email - [helpdesk@healthwatchwestsussex.co.uk](mailto:helpdesk@healthwatchwestsussex.co.uk)



Website - [www.healthwatchwestsussex.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchwestsussex.co.uk)

You can also follow our social media channels to always be updated with the latest  
in health and social care news across West Sussex: [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#).

If you have questions about the content of this update, please either call 0300 012  
0122 or email [cheryl.berry@healthwatchwestsussex.co.uk](mailto:cheryl.berry@healthwatchwestsussex.co.uk)

