

COVID-19 and the Voluntary and Community Sector
A Gloucester Perspective

Executive Summary

As COVID-19 continues to evolve in society, it is important that we as a city council understand how this is affecting one of our society's most important sectors – the voluntary and community sector (VCS). Gloucester City Council reached out to 17 organisations to invite them to take part in an interview as part of a VCS 'stock take'. The purpose of the interviews was to help Gloucester City Council understand the impact COVID-19 is having on the sector. These organisations form a representative sample of Gloucester's voluntary and community sector, however this is not intended to be a comprehensive analysis of all VCS organisations in Gloucester. These sample organisations were agreed upon by Gloucester City Council's Cabinet Members with input from Group Leaders.

The organisations and charities the Council have spoken to range from small independent community centres, to larger, well known and respected city and county wide volunteering bodies – a full description of each organisation we spoke to can be found in the Appendix. The purpose of this report is to conduct an assessment of how Gloucester's VCS organisations are adapting and responding to the pressures of COVID-19, and set out recommendations based on the SWOT analyses conducted (also found in the Appendix). Through the research and data collected, this report sets out the following *Key Findings*:

- VCS organisations in Gloucester have adapted well in the short term through implementing stop gap measures and other temporary solutions.
- Organisations are facing struggles, particularly surrounding finances, access to services, technological literacy and ensuring they retain client relationships.
- Changes in demand have varied across the voluntary and community sector - those organisations directly involved in the COVID-19 response effort have seen a notable shift in demand, with increases in some areas alongside changes in the service provisions they offer.
- There is variation in how staffing levels have been impacted by COVID-19, largely dependent on to what extent the organisation has been able to respond directly to COVID-19.
- There has been an increased prevalence of volunteers in the community willing to support VCS operations, along with increasingly creative and flexible ways of working.
- Most VCS organisations have not yet had time to consider the longer-term impacts beyond the immediate issues they are dealing with. Above all, organisations have expressed concern about the loss of face to face contact and the impacts that will have on their organisation and its connections with the community in the longer term.
- Organisations across the sector are looking for greater recognition for their staff and volunteers in the light of the pandemic, to celebrate their contribution and thank them for their hard work throughout this crisis.
- There is a desire for greater coordination across the sector to avoid duplication of effort, and ensure organisations are able to collaborate and learn from each other in their time of need.

From the key findings outlined above, the recommendations of this report are:

1. Invest in technology
2. Address food poverty in Gloucester
3. Better co-ordinate work with local authorities and councils
4. Develop an employee and volunteer retention strategy
5. Increase publicity initiatives and support for the sector

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the voluntary and community sector in Gloucester and how it operates. In order to assess this situation and establish recommendations to help the sector, Gloucester City Council has undertaken research to understand the impact of COVID-19 on the sector as a whole.

In this report, we examine the experiences of multiple VCS organisations in Gloucester and assess how they are adapting to the current COVID-19 crisis. We spoke with 17 organisations ranging from large established service providers to grass-roots providers – these organisations are listed in the Appendix. In the interviews, the research team asked seven questions, listed below.

- 1. How is your organization managing during the COVID-19 outbreak?*
- 2. As an organisation, what is your biggest challenge as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak, and do you feel you can overcome it?*
- 3. Overall, has demand for your organisation changed due to the COVID-19 outbreak? With 0 being a significant decrease, 5 being “normal” and 10 being significant increase?*
- 4. Has your organisation seen a change in staffing levels since the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak? With 0 being a significant decrease, 5 being “normal” and 10 being significant increase?*
- 5. What positive impacts, if any, has your organisation experienced since the start of the Pandemic and (how) are you planning to sustain these?*
- 6. Have there been any struggles? If so, how have you overcome them?*
- 7. Aside from financial assistance, what support would your organisation positively benefit from during the pandemic?*

The report will present and organise its findings through the lens of each question, setting out the responses we received and key takeaways. For those questions where a 0 to 10 scale was used, we will also map out where different types of organisation across the sector sat on that scale. The report will examine the key findings from each question in the next section, and will go on to draw conclusions from the interviews conducted. The appendix lists the organisations we interviewed, and provides more detailed responses to each question, using a SWOT analysis model.

Other reports have also been written on this topic, including one developed by the Barnwood Trust, which the Council has reviewed and considered in the development of this report. This report and its conclusions specifically aim to support and inform the recovery work of Gloucester City Council in moving beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, with key learnings and takeaways set out to help determine the best route forward to support the sector and our community resilience recovery work at Gloucester City Council.

1. How is your organization managing during the COVID-19 outbreak?

Many of the organisations we spoke to have had to substantially shift or re-align the services they provide to meet the needs and demands of their community in these times. Our research pulled out five key findings which demonstrate how the sector is managing during this outbreak:

“Despite the current circumstances, our organisation is very busy and present in the community”

- Having to close community halls has meant a loss of income for many VCS organisations, particularly community associations. Whilst some organisations have been able to furlough staff, they still must pay their fixed costs and bills despite their income stopping.
- Many organisations have sought to set up subsidiary groups which focus solely on the impacts COVID-19 is having in their communities. This has included setting up food banks and other community services.
- For organisations providing services direct to customers, the largest concern has been their inability to deliver these services face to face with clients, which has led to numerous difficulties adapting to virtual ways of working.
- More positively, most organisations have been able to adapt quickly to the challenges of the pandemic, including using technology to facilitate client and volunteer engagement.
- Technology and remote working is more difficult for some in the sector, with one organisation citing their inability to access emails while not connected to the server, as their use of technology is dependent on their physical presence in their building.

VCS organisations in Gloucester have adapted well in the short term through implementing stop gap measures and other temporary solutions to address the current needs and demands they face.

2. As an organisation, what is your biggest challenge as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak, and do you feel you can overcome it?

VCS organisations discussed a range of challenges that they have faced during this pandemic. These challenges largely revolve around a lack of face-to-face contact and attempts to overcome this.

“Staff being able to work from home has worked well, as we are able to continue offering some parts of the service we used to provide”

- Organisations say they are not fully able to support the most vulnerable due to the fact they can no longer meet face to face. Some are worried these people will not return once lockdown is over.
- One organisation mentioned the challenge of ensuring that the contact details for their clients are up-to-date and accurate, making it easy to reach them via email, phone or post.
- There is concern over digital poverty, as many VCS clients either don't have access to technology or are not technologically literate, there is opportunity to improve digital literacy and build this into the existing services VCS organisations provide.
- Despite the challenges associated with technology, various organisations want to celebrate the community and its resilience once the lockdown is lifted and are exploring different ways of doing this to reunite their communities.
- Other challenges include navigating the UK Government's business grants and furlough schemes that many organisations found complicated and confusing.
- Having to close community halls has been extremely difficult, the largest concern for these organisations has been their inability to collect rent for the use of these spaces. This has led to great fiscal uncertainty for many organisations.

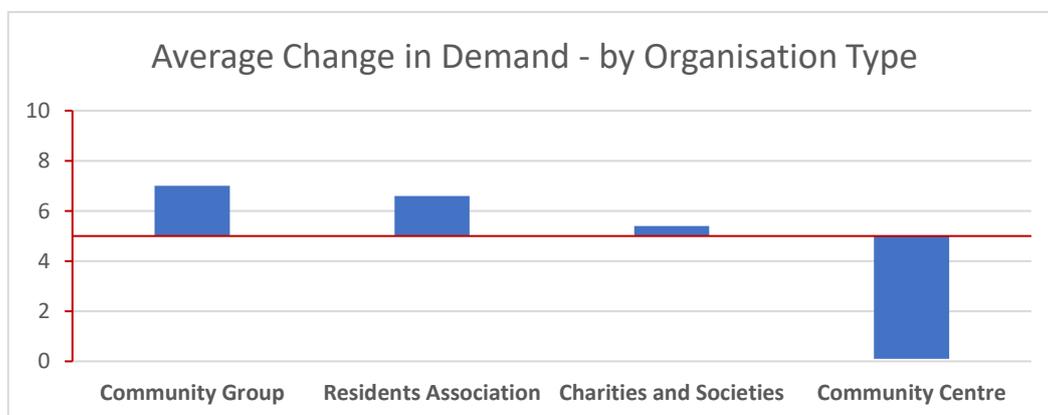
Organisations are facing struggles but are focused on day to day operations at this time. It is unclear how a small minority of the organisations will overcome these challenges in the long term, however it is clear that VCS organisations will increasingly look to move services online where possible.

3. Overall, has demand for your organisation changed due to the COVID-19 outbreak? With 0 being a significant decrease, 5 being “normal” and 10 being a significant increase?

Many VCS organisations have seen a change in demand; however, the results are very dependent on the services these organisations provide. On the whole organisations have seen a moderate increase in demand, with a notable exception being community centres – which have had to shut down most of their activities due to the need to close physical spaces.

“The services our organisation provided have changed significantly since the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak. We now have more volunteers covering a range of services”

- It was found that many of the VCS organisations have had to adapt and change the services they offer, rather than seeing a change in demand for their services.
- Organisations said that they are now offering services that they wouldn’t have offered before the pandemic started.
- Some organisations pointed out that previously they had a mix of both high and low intensity client needs but are now particularly engaging with people with higher level needs.
- An inability to meet face to face with clients is impacting demand, and some organisations are worried about losing sight of their regular clients.
- The majority of VCS organisations are trying their best to maintain constant contact with clients through other mediums available.



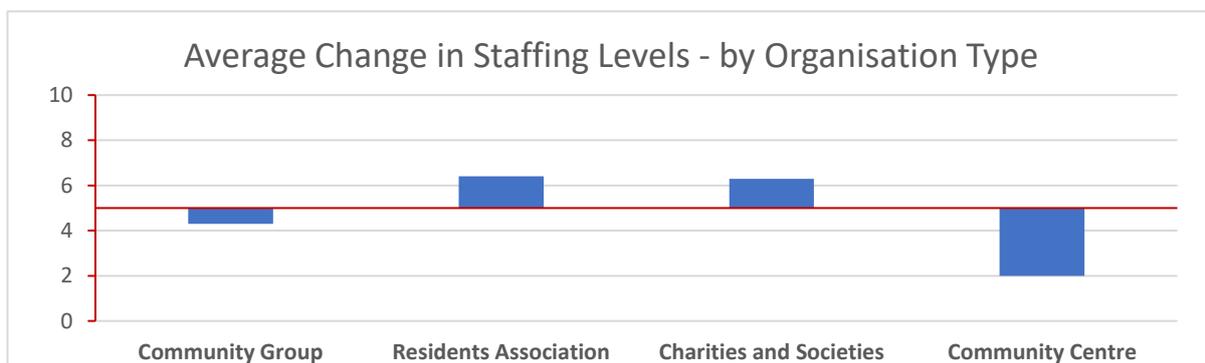
Changes in demand have varied across the voluntary and community sector. Those organisations directly involved in the COVID-19 response effort have seen a notable shift in demand, while for those organisations not involved directly in responding to COVID-19, the picture is much more nuanced.

4. Has your organisation seen a change in staffing levels since the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak? With 0 being a significant decrease, 5 being “normal” and 10 being a significant increase?

Several organisations have seen a modest uptick in staffing levels since the start of the pandemic, largely due to increased numbers of volunteers rather than new paid employees.

“It feels as if this pandemic has made our organisation go back to its roots, it has reminded us as to why it was founded many decades ago”

- As the chart below shows, there is very much a nuanced picture when it comes to changes in staffing levels– with slight increases for residents’ associations and charities, and decreases for community groups and community centres.
- On the whole, most VCS organisations have been able to maintain the same amount of staff during the COVID-19 crisis so far.
- There is disparity within the sector with organisations directly involved in the COVID-19 response seeing upticks in volunteers, while those in other fields have been more likely to see decreases.
- This increase in staffing levels has allowed some organisations to expand the services they provide – but several organisations noted that these gains may not last in the longer term.
- Some of these organisations have had to furlough large portions of their staff, and some are worried about having to make some staff redundant because of the financial implications of the pandemic.



There is significant variation in how staffing levels have been impacted by COVID-19, largely dependent on how the organisation has been able to respond directly to COVID-19. The furlough scheme was utilised by only a handful of organisations interviewed, however for the organisations that did have to use it, the proportion of staff being furloughed was significant.

5. What positive impacts, if any, has your organisation experienced since the start of the pandemic and (how) are you planning to sustain these?

Many of the organisations noted that a real sense of community and comradery has grown since the start of the outbreak, and people in their communities are more willing to help.

“We have become more embedded in our community and will continue with some of the projects that we have started running due to COVID-19”

- A minority of organisations noted an increase of new volunteers and staff as a positive result of the pandemic.
- Organisations have said that the pandemic has caused their organisation to change its administrative practices in a positive way, as they no longer need to function in such a rigid way as they have in the past.
- Most VCS organisations are looking to expand the use of technology within their operations.

While COVID-19 has been a largely negative situation for everybody, there have been some clear positives for the voluntary and community sector. This includes the increased prevalence of volunteers in the community supporting VCS operations, along with the increasingly creative and flexible ways of working that have been adopted.

6. Have there been any struggles? If so, how have you overcome them?

For many VCS organisations the biggest struggle is the uncertainty posed by the current circumstances, as they try to overcome both the immediate and long-term challenges they face.

“We are worried about claims for loss of income because of the forced lockdown and forcing programmes to shut down”

- Many organisations must be able to function for the long term with social distancing measures in place and finding ways of doing this is proving challenging.
- Another worry some organisations are trying to address is ensuring their clients are receiving the medical attention and treatments they need.
- Organisations have seen an increase in people that are anxious about getting food and supplies, largely because of a loss of work and/or being furloughed.
- On top of this, due to a loss of income, particularly for community centres, VCS organisations have their own worries about ensuring their funding lasts and that they don't deplete their reserves during these challenging times.

There have been many struggles raised by VCS organisations, but most have not yet had time to consider the longer-term impacts beyond the immediate issues they are dealing with. Organisations have expressed concern about how they are going to implement social distancing measures, and many organisations are worried about their financial well-being.

7. Aside from financial assistance, what support would your organisation positively benefit from during the pandemic?

Despite the financial difficulties the sector is facing, VCS organisations mentioned various other ways in which they would like to be supported.

“Our sector is not getting enough recognition; we have selfless volunteers going about caring for and helping our society's most vulnerable”

- Many of the organisations stated multiple times that their sector is not getting enough recognition during this crisis.
- One VCS organisation said there needs to be more support for the sector as a whole, stating that public sector services are fundamentally flawed at all levels, including both the City and County Councils, when it comes to supporting the voluntary and community sector.
- One organisation suggested a celebratory event once lockdown is over, as one way of reconnecting with the community and recognising the significant contribution of the sector to the COVID-19 response effort.
- There is also the opportunity for the City Council to develop a more coordinated process of engaging with the Voluntary and Community sector when commissioning services, which could potentially be facilitated through the County Council.

The majority of organisations across the sector are looking for greater recognition for their staff and volunteers in light of the pandemic. There is also a desire for greater coordination across the sector to avoid duplication of effort, and ensure organisations can collaborate and learn from each other.

Recommendations

1. Invest in technology

- Continue to pilot Groop as a Community Management Platform to support the sector
- Facilitate a scheme, possibly across the County whereby the VCS is able to 'bulk-buy' hard and soft-ware
- Facilitate and support the development of digital skills and abilities, enabling VCS organisations to learn from each other

2. Address food poverty in Gloucester

- In partnership with the VCS and the City Council, design and implement a project to address food poverty and promote social connectivity and greater wellbeing and health through food.
- Through collaboration in the voluntary and community sector, establish more permanent and reliable initiatives that seek to address food poverty and provide food to those who need it.

3. Better co-ordinate work with local authorities and councils

- Establish a VCS forum, initially facilitated by the City Council in order to encourage regular dialogue and information exchange between the City Council and the VCS as well as promote learning and collaboration across the City Voluntary and Community sector.
- Influence the County Council to ensure that county wide commissioned VCS infrastructure support is visible, appropriate and successful
- Allow local VCS organisations to become increasingly involved with the running and management of the Community Help Hub at the Gloucester level, furthering the progress of Gloucester's Asset Based Community Development

4. Develop an employee and volunteer retention strategy

- Assist in the development of a volunteer and staff retention plan by organisations, to consider how to retain staff and the right balance.
- Establishing a Gloucestershire wide system that can attract, recruit and match volunteers and provide more informal help. This can form a part of the county wide community recovery work, building on the Help Hub and working with Districts.

5. Increase publicity initiatives and support for the sector

- Recognition through a county wide VCS organisation, maximising opportunities at the City level (both through officers and members) to promote our voluntary and community sector.
- The development of other publicity initiatives – such as a joint newsletter for VCS organisations across Gloucester, or an online web page listing the services on offer, all to help raise awareness and drive engagement.
- These initiatives could be supported by the Council through social media campaigns and web resources to outline the organisations and support on offer across the city.
- There is a potential opportunity for the council to review monetary assistance that could support some VCS organisations in the areas where loss of income has been substantial and poses a risk to the continuation of services the VCS organisation provides. This assistance could be provided and aided by the Gloucestershire Funding Consortium.

Conclusion

It is clear from these findings that VCS organisations are doing their best to adapt their existing resources to meet the current demands our communities face due to COVID-19, but the sector has faced numerous challenges during this time.

One major challenge to overcome has been the loss of face to face connections many of these organisations depend upon to engage with their clients – particularly as community halls and centres have had to close, and people were urged to stay at home. Having to shift these connections online through the use of video conferencing applications such as Skype and Zoom has helped to bridge this gap, however some organisations have raised the issue of digital poverty as well as digital literacy, especially for elderly clients.

On top of this, the closure of many of the community halls and centres has led to one of the most pressing issues of all - finances. Many organisations have noted that because of their hall closures, additional sources of revenue have been cut off, and for a small number of organisations this loss of revenue poses a serious threat to the future existence of their organisation.

Despite the many negative impacts that COVID-19 is having, there have been some positive outcomes. A real sense of comradery and community is now felt throughout Gloucester's communities and neighbourhoods. Multiple organisations have noted that many new volunteers have joined their organisation to help with the delivery of multiple services. The ability to try and retain these volunteers is just one of the many opportunities the voluntary and community sector can take advantage of.

In conclusion, Gloucester's voluntary and community sector is managing its way through the COVID-19 pandemic well. Many short-term problems affecting organisations have been resolved, or stop gap measures have been introduced to see the organisations through the pandemic. However, the major threat facing the sector in the long term is the viability of some of these organisations. There is large concern about revenue sources no longer existing, and organisations not being able to rely on surplus funds in order to recover the costs incurred and income lost during the outbreak.

The recommendations outlined above could help inform the Council's recovery work as we come out of the COVID-19 pandemic. There are multiple options to consider to ensure Gloucester's voluntary and community sector is resilient, agile and adaptable – putting it in a strong position to continue to succeed in the longer term.

Appendix

The research team spoke to a total of 17 VCS organisations ranging from small community centres, to large city and county wide charities. As mentioned in the introduction of the report, the organisations the research team spoke to form a representative sample of Gloucester’s voluntary and community sector, however this is not intended to be a comprehensive analysis of all VCS organisations in Gloucester. These sample organisations have been agreed upon by Gloucester City Council’s Cabinet Members with input from Group Leaders.

All organisations were involved in interviews on the basis of anonymity; however, we have included below a brief description of each organisation and the type of work they are involved in. The second chart below groups these organisations into their relevant organisation type.

<i>Organisation Letter</i>	<i>Brief Description</i>
Organisation A	Support organisation for new residents of Gloucester
Organisation B	Community fundraising organisation in Gloucester
Organisation C	Community centre and hall for residents
Organisation D	Independent organisation providing advice and assistance to those in need
Organisation E	Sports and community venue for events in Gloucester
Organisation F	Organisation supporting vulnerable and disadvantaged individuals
Organisation G	An organisation that facilitates community projects and engagement
Organisation H	Community development and regeneration organisation
Organisation I	A religious institution in Gloucester
Organisation J	A community centre and association providing a meeting place and social activities
Organisation K	A support group for Gloucester’s mature communities
Organisation L	A community development institution to support social and academic wellbeing
Organisation M	Provides youth and community-based activities in Gloucester
Organisation N	Local community association and centre
Organisation O	Non-profit organisation providing free and impartial advice
Organisation P	A social club and community association in Gloucester
Organisation Q	A health care charity based in Gloucester

Organisation Type	Organisations
Charities and Societies	F, H, I, L, M, O, Q
Community Centre	E, N
Community Group	A, D, K
Residents Association	B, C, G, J, P

These organisations represent a range of community interests, including organisations that operate at the street level all the way up to those who are county-wide or part of a wider national network. They also cover various aspects of the voluntary and community sector, working to address multiple themes throughout our communities.

The following SWOT analysis below informs the report and recommendations above. The SWOT analysis is formatted in a way that provides utmost transparency while keeping the organisations interviewed and their answers anonymous. The SWOT analysis provides a detailed breakdown of the responses received and is intended to supplement the report as a record of what organisations said.

1. How is your organization managing during the COVID-19 outbreak?

Strengths:	Weaknesses:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implemented a plan of action in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. • Regular workloads and day to day work continues, we've also been able to provide regular physical and emotional check-ups for our clients and staff. • The current crisis has presented us with the opportunity to set up subsidiary organisations to focus solely on the COVID-19 crisis. Organisations have been able to quickly set up food banks. • Despite the current circumstances, our organisation is very busy and present in the community. • Our organisation has transitioned to online support in some areas with volunteers now using email and phone communications to reach our clients. • Our staff have benefitted from the government's furlough scheme, while those staff we have retained are keeping the organisation going. • We were able to reduce all our outgoing costs to a minimum and put heating on low. • Our office phones have been redirected to someone's house phone. • We have the opportunity to support our community by our main hall being used to store supplies. • Working with different community groups. Our main focus is sending out supplies, running errands and community work. • We are fortunate to receive donations from different organisations which is supporting us through this time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Closing the community hall has been extremely difficult for us in terms of a financial and social impact. • The food bank we operate is extremely challenging to do without our community hall. • One of our main worries is the fact that we are now unable to have face to face contact with our clients - this is a big challenge for us. • We are not managing – this has been a big struggle for us.
Opportunities:	Threats:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with other clubs and associations would be nice. • Our organisation has adapted well and the use of technology and remote working • We continue to lobby and contact politicians locally to advertise the ongoing work our organisation does. We also post these on our website. The HR process for furloughing was 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our hall had to close, no revenue is coming in at all. • We will deal with the financial implications later. • Our organisation is waiting for the government advice about what they can do and when they can open. • We are worried about our partners and whether we can fund them.

<p>confusing at first, however they managed to do it.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• We currently don't have any remote access emails systems or computer network; this would be great and help us out.• We have offered our premises to the city and county councillors to use for storage.• Our organisation is very much undertaking projects during this time which are engaging with the community, and we are busy delivering food and prescriptions to vulnerable people. This varies from project to project.• We are using our premises to prepare and sending out supplies. It's a community effort.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• We are unable to provide any services since our organisation had to close.• We have suspended all our community activities, we had lots of groups meeting per week.• We are finding it difficult keeping up the specialist work we used to provide as one element of it normally brings in a regular income.
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2. As an organisation, what is your biggest challenge as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak, and do you feel you can overcome it?

Strengths:	Weakness:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring our contact details for our clients are up-to-date and accurate, making it easy to reach them. Our organisation is actively thinking about and preparing for life beyond lockdown. • Our organisation wants to celebrate the community and its resilience once the lockdown is lifted. This is a good opportunity for the organisation to re-connect with our clients and volunteers. • Finances and money are no longer our biggest challenge, we are in a stronger position on these fronts and we have moved on to focus on other aspects of our organisation. • We have reduced our overheads to a bare minimum, as we are fortunate to have a Contingency fund • Our Organisation moved to Office 365 cloud-based system before COVID-19. • Staff that have been able to work from home has worked well, as we are able to continue offering some parts of the service we used to provide. • keeping in touch by phone with our volunteers ensuring that they are ok. • We have adapted our offering and are now doing this online, which has benefitted our client group as they feel they are doing something useful. • We are remaining positive as we are part of a committee, we are grateful for what support we get. When things start running again, we will be inundated with work. • Currently applying for funding to continue with our work, we are waiting to hear the results of applications submitted. • We have been delivering little projects within the community in order to subsidise some of the costs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The technology has caused some problems and issues. Using Zoom can make tasks harder. We are more likely to miss things on Zoom. • Not being able to properly stay in touch with clients and worrying they will not return when lockdown is over. • Our organisation is struggling to contact the chair and committee members during lockdown. • Not fully able to support the most vulnerable due to no longer meeting face to face. • The panic at the start, about being able to afford to get through this crisis and keeping our organisation running was a major worry. • Challenges in supporting the vulnerable and at risk in terms of mental health during these uncertain times. • Financial survival was a concern for us as we had to close and we still had some overheads, that we reduced to a bare minimum, we are using our reserves. • Unfortunately, we had to cancel all our fundraising activities, which is what we relied on to deliver our projects. • Our biggest challenge was that meeting up as a group was prohibited, which is something we couldn't overcome. • Many of our members stopped attending well before the government announced the lockdown, due to pressures from family, this impacted on our numbers. • Individuals that use our organisation are frustrated they can't attend any of the services that we delivered; we too are frustrated that we are unable to increase our funds. • Finances are a real struggle for us, as we receive our funds after delivering our services.
Opportunities:	Threats:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our organisation has been able to add people in need to our outreach programme. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We don't want to lose our client base.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our clients are not tech savvy, and getting online is a challenge, however we are amending our programming for the future and for right now – helping to widen participation. • We have been able to navigate the Government business grants and furlough schemes. • Our clients that are providing an income for us are mainly vulnerable, we are hoping that they can continue using us after the crisis. • Our organisation generated an income from selling products and room hire - we anticipate this becoming an opportunity again after COVID-19. • We have adapted our offering to online which is proving successful, as the staff feel valued. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paying the rent and utilities is a challenge in the short term, however there will be even bigger long-term challenges once this is over. • We have enough money to sustain ourselves for the short term, however, if the lockdown is prolonged further, we might not be able to last much longer. • The financial losses are a massive blow to our organisation and the future of our organisation is unclear. • Our area is quite deprived, there is a lack of affordable activities for people to engage in. • Whilst our premises have been closed, we have experienced some damage caused by squirrels. • We don't want to take want to take out a loan as we will be unable to pay it back.
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3. Overall, has demand for your organisation changed due to the COVID-19 outbreak? With 0 being a significant decrease, 5 being “normal” and 10 being a significant increase?

Strengths:	Weakness:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The services our organisation provided have changed significantly since the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak. We now have more volunteers covering a range of services. • Our demand hasn't necessarily changed, but rather, it has shifted to areas or services we didn't provide a lot of before the pandemic. • Our services have not had to change significantly, and the levels of service are in line with what we experienced before the pandemic. • The core function of our organisation is publicly funded, and we have an obligation to continue to provide this service. • The service we are providing now in this crisis is what we have always provided, so demand hasn't shifted. • We have seen an increase in demand, previously we had a mix of high and low intensity client needs but now we are engaging more with people with higher level needs, and the type of needs is much different than before. • Our experience is different for each project - for some there has been an increase, with regards to supporting our community. • Elements of the projects we deliver build people's self-confidence and we would like to continue with this as it's very important to those individuals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are losing sight of some of our regular clients that used to come in as groups. • We are no longer able to use our physical space. • More people are unemployed as a result of COVID-19 and there are limited job opportunities available. • We are unable to meet the demand, there is a limit to what we can do. • Our organisation has had a decrease in demand which has had a massive impact on us.
Opportunities:	Threats:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The demand for our services is now different and much higher because of the challenges of COVID-19. • We are seeing more people by making the sessions with our clients shorter, we recently received funding to help us engage with younger people. • We have become really reliant on others to ensure the groups of people we serve are ok. • Demand has increased for food and other supplies, so we set up a food bank, this is something we wouldn't have done were it not for COVID-19. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our demand has significantly decreased as we have had to totally shut down. • We are now unable to help our client group due to COVID-19.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• We have adapted our projects in order to support our groups differently.• Our buildings are not open, but we are doing everything we can to still deliver a service. | |
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4. Has your organisation seen a change in staffing levels since the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak? With 0 being a significant decrease, 5 being “normal” and 10 being a significant increase?

Strengths:	Weaknesses:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have been able to maintain the same amount of staff during the COVID-19 crisis. • It has been really rewarding and a nice experience to see so many volunteers in our community come together. It is creating a real sense of community and I feel it is pulling the community together. We have seen an incredible increase in the amount of volunteers joining us since the start of the pandemic. • It feels as if this pandemic has made our organisation go back to its roots, it has reminded us as to why it was founded many decades ago. • We have now started to pay some of our staff during the outbreak which in turn has made our organisation more productive. • Our staff are working hard, however our availability of work is limited. • Due to the government furlough scheme we have be able to maintain our staff for once the crisis is over. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are no longer taking in any volunteers; however, we are focusing on a smaller number of clients. One of our areas of focus right now is ensuring home schooling can be done effectively for those families who might not have the technology. • We have seen a significant decrease in our staffing levels.
Opportunities:	Threats:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have seen a huge surge in staffing levels, as well as a huge surge in services we provide. • Every road and street in our community is taken care of and accounted for. • For our organisation, we haven’t seen a massive intake of volunteers or staff, however we are encouraging others in our community to seek this opportunity out. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our organisation is worried about people not returning to the community. Our core groups are those using the centre, we are worried they will not come back after this is all over. • Our organisation has had to furlough 50% of our staff, this has been primarily on the retail side of our organisation.

5. What positive impacts, if any, has your organisation experienced since the start of the pandemic and (how) are you planning to sustain these?

Strengths:	Weakness:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Despite the challenging times we are all in, it has given me and our organisation time to really reflect and think if we can do things differently. We have been able to sort out a lot of back of office and administrative matters, while also being able to take time to reflect. • The main positive impact on our organisation and community as a whole is the big sense of community. More people are coming out to support the community and more people are building comradery, and friendships with people they didn't even know before. It took people who were isolated to come together. • It has been nice to be working with new people and creating these new relationships. • New partnerships and conversations we are having with other organisations are good and helpful. • Our organisation was able to hold a financial contingency reserve, which we are relying on now, to help us get through this difficult time. • We have several partnership meetings online which is working very well, we are saving on travel costs, we have also got much better at using the online tools, which will change how we work in the future. • We have become more embedded in our community and will continue with some of the projects that we have started running due to COVID-19. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We would like to see these new volunteers retained beyond the crisis, however, we are open to what people want to do and are ready for them not to return.
Opportunities:	Threats:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our organisation has changed its long-term planning approach. We want to improve our networking to make sure that we are there to support and engage the community. We are also looking to transition certain services into the association in order to protect them. • We have realised that our organisational practices did not have to be so rigid in the past, for example, our meetings did not always need to take place in person. We are looking to expand the liberal use of our 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There have been no positive impacts at all. • It has been very difficult; nothing has been positive. • This could have signalled the end of our organisation.

technology as we have become more flexible during this crisis.

- We are looking at new flexibilities in order to adapt to the current circumstances, but also for the future.
- Our organisation is doing things differently and has become more efficient through video calls and administrative work, these are practices we intend on keeping for the long term.
- New people are now developing relationships with the organisation, it is a new edge in the community that is beginning to evolve, and we think we can retain this after the pandemic.

6. Have there been any struggles? If so, how have you overcome them?

Strengths:	Weaknesses:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is the immediate and long term challenges our organisation faces in the wake of the pandemic. Our organisation is adapting and must be able to function for the long term with these social distancing measures in place. • Our organisation is looking to move our social activities online. • Our organisation has benefited from a grant that has helped us significantly. • We have good community links which have enabled us to still receive our organisation’s mail to a staff member’s home. • Sending out weekly updates to our members has been good as the communication is still happening, at present we are getting by. • Referrals are coming in from some councils, and those patterns have been working well. • Apart from cash flow, our organisation has not had struggles. • We have no struggles we as an organisation reacted to the situation quite well. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring the message is getting across to the client group and getting them to understand that the lockdown is serious. Furthermore, we want to make these groups realise the dangerous actions they are taking and how it puts others at risk. • Another worry is ensuring clients get the medical attention they need, even those in the shielding category. Things like this take a lot of coordination, staying safe etc. How do you weigh up risk, what are they and how do you manage these risks? It is challenging. • We need to ensure that the vulnerable in our society are not being neglected. • People are anxious about getting food and supplies because of loss of work and furlough, we are calming people down. • We are confused about how our organisation was supposed to implement the lockdown. • We are worried about claims for loss of income because of the forced lockdown and forcing programmes to shut down. • We had to research all the legal implications of furlough, this was not clear at first, the scheme and dates for the schemes have been confusing. • Struggles are around the short-term delivery model. • Our organisation doesn’t have the systems in place to remotely access emails, and also to pay staff, we need to go into the office to do this. • Receiving our mail is difficult as we don’t have a post box. • We don’t have teleconferencing provision to communicate and have discussions with our members, some of which are elderly and can't use Zoom or Skype, also some of these individuals don’t have broadband. • We are struggling to come to terms with being denied each other’s company, as we are missing everyone. • One of our organisation’s biggest challenges is reaching people who aren't connected, either by IT or otherwise. • Human resources and uncertainty of the lockdown at the beginning was very difficult,

	working out what to do, and trying to find a balance, it was a very challenging time.
Opportunities:	Threats:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If we had a simple phone number that we can dial into, that would help us a great deal, we are willing to pay pepper corn rent for it. • Had we known that this would have happened (COVID-19) we would have issued everyone with a small device to keep in touch with our members. We and our members are not up with technology. • We have had a big learning curve in relation to IT, around people not having the right equipment at home. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are beginning to use funding reserves and need to ensure these are not depleted. • Operating with proper hygiene tools available. • Lack of support from local government.

7. Aside from financial assistance, what support would your organisation positively benefit from during the pandemic?

Strengths:	Weaknesses:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our organisation still has quite a bit of cash left, so our finances are not an issue at the moment. • Our organisation is doing well despite the pandemic. • We are very happy that we have communication and we can keep in touch, via email and over the phones. • We have used this time to sort things out, and we are looking at how we can make things work in the future. • We are fortunate that we have staff on the ground that have been running errands for vulnerable people in the community. • We have spent a lot of money on our centre and have some funds left which should tide us over. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our sector is not getting enough recognition, we have selfless volunteers going about caring for and helping our society's most vulnerable. • We need to get more volunteers in, as some have had to take leave due to bereavements. • There needs to be more support for the organisations serving our communities. We think public services are fundamentally flawed at all levels including both the City and County Councils, as well as public health. • For some of our group members coming to our centre was the only time they went out, and now they are unable to leave their houses, due to the current situation. • Very few referrals coming in from GPs, they could be referring some people who are self-isolating.
Opportunities:	Threats:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is an opportunity to give real recognition to the voluntary and community sector. • Having professional advice, especially with regards to Human Resources, would be hugely helpful. • It would be beneficial to have a singular member from the City Council to contact with regards to the voluntary and community sector and ask our questions. • It would be beneficial to some organisations if you were to use the communication channels that the City Council have to advertise/ bring attention to the services that are being provided in the community, and signposting is really important for us. • It would be nice to see the voluntary and community sector act in a more co-ordinated way. • Our organisation would benefit from working with the local council and councillors to look at issues that have come up since lockdown, and the impacts on VCS organisations. • We need an economic development strategy that focuses on the peripheral communities, and not just the city centre in Gloucester. • Our organisation would like some support either from the Council or VCS, around better 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our organisation must look at costs, we are unable to furlough and might have to make employees redundant.

understanding of accessing our computer systems remotely, as we don't have the skills and knowledge.

- We are hoping to begin to re-open and have small group gatherings on a limited basis once the government relaxes the lockdown.
- It would be good if we had the technology for keeping in touch, we are grateful for phones and emails.
- We have started to think about how our organisation will function practically once we have come through this, we are looking at our policies and procedures to ensure people's safety and we are guided by the advice given. We don't see our organisation continuing as it was before COVID-19 took hold. Better ways of ensuring referrals are made, and better connections between agencies.
- An opportunity for our volunteers to be recognised for their rich community spirit.
- We would like those who are receiving our service to be patient with us given the circumstances.

Special thanks to all the Organisations that took the time to share their experiences with us during this difficult time.