

Community Resilience – Recovery Plan

1. Introduction and scope of the recovery work

The local community response during the C-19 pandemic has been overwhelmingly positive and has seen strong local help and support, some of which was organised through City Council officers, members, existing community and civil society groups; other activity emerging and responding to a changing situation. It has involved over 500 street champions and hundreds of people volunteering or helping in all wards of the City. A number of new structures and networks have supported this effort, including:

- The Gloucestershire Help Hub as a county-wide portal where people registered if they needed help or wanted to give help in order to be matched. In Gloucester we have seen 2,107 interactions with the Help Hub between 20 March and 18 June. Of these 914 were offers of help (with 97 from businesses); while 1,193 were requests for help (with 309 indicating that neighbours need help).
- A network of over 500 street champions across the City who support and organize volunteers at street or neighbourhood level
- A network of organisers at ward level, including elected members and community/VCS leaders and businesses, who created a Food Consortium and a local food referral system that distributed food to over 10,000 beneficiaries
- The Gloucester Community Building Collective and their team of community builders who supported city wide projects working with partners such as Play Gloucestershire, Active Gloucestershire, the Culture Trust or Community Centres (ie the Club@Tuffley) to deliver activity based support
- Reliance on existing and deep structure (often traditional and family based) in some parts of the city, for example Barton and Tredworth

This mix of city-wide consistent approaches and diverse local self-managed activity enabled a certain level of oversight (ie though the organisers at ward level) whilst at the same time creating a dynamic and fast response.

Our VCS organisations played a very important role in the response. A recent ‘stocktake’ involving 17 organisations from a broad spectrum highlighted that on the whole VCS organisations in Gloucester have adapted well in the short term through implementing stop gap measures and other temporary solutions. The report identified a number of strengths and challenges which we need to address as part of the recovery work, for example:

- 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 the extent to which 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 impact beyond the immediate issues they are dealing with. Above all, organisations have expressed concern about the loss of face to face contact and the impact this 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 can collaborate and learn from each other in their time of need.

The following is in scope for the recovery work

- Activities to celebrate and further grow asset-based initiatives that create closer, resilient and self-sufficient communities
- Activities to maintain, grow and transfer the local 'help hub' infrastructure into community leadership/ownership
- Creating the right infrastructure and support for civil-society organisations (ie VCS and community groups)
- Initiatives to re-balancing the dialogue between citizens and the Council – moving to joint stewardship of resources
- Changing the way we work together as stakeholders and partners; but also with our communities (systems; values; behaviours; power)

2. What are we going to do: Return – Retain – Resist - Reimagine

Return – What did we stop doing that we need to get back to doing?

We need to take quick action to support our smaller/grassroots community groups and community centers and those who have been affected by loss of income as a result of lockdown and those who need capacity and support to change their operating models to one that can cope with the impact of social distancing. This will enable them to return to playing the important roles they play within their local communities.

We will do this by:

- i. Establishing a one off Recovery Fund to provide grant funding to small/grassroots organisations and community centers to deal with the financial impact of Covid-19 and support their recovery
- ii. Introduce a 'Business Mentor' Scheme, which will broker informal mentoring/advice from businesses to smaller VCS organisations within the City.

Retain – what is it we have started and will be useful to continue?

We need to retain the good will and enthusiasm of the many volunteers and volunteer organisers in the City.

We will do this by

- iii. Piloting a digital solution (Groop App) to enable better organisation and self management of help and support at local and neighbourhood level. This App provides a structured yet adaptable platform for communication and organisation

which is secure and safe and which will help us to connect with those who want to continue to provide help through the Gloucestershire Help Hub.

- iv. We will support the creation of a county-wide portal and mechanism to recruit, on-board and place people who wish to volunteer.

Resist – what did we used to do that we don't want to do now?

We want to build on the positive changes in how we behaved during the pandemic, continuing to be less hierarchical, more values driven and with more passion. We want to engage in a focused, open and honest matter that leads to good outcomes and where we understand and accept the pressures and constraints we face and try to work together to overcome these.

We will do this by:

- v. Changing our communication and the way we consult and engage with communities, particularly on Budgets, Strategies and the Council Plan.

Reimagine – what ideas can we pursue that will help us to get back better

We want to create the conditions that can address inequalities across our communities and encourage and equip local people to come together, articulate their vision and hopes for their localities and take steps to realise this.

We will do this by:

- vi. Building on the Food Consortium, and working in partnership with the Gloucester Gateway Trust and others, we will develop a Gloucester Food Project that will improve access to food for those in food poverty and will augment this in creative ways by using food as a means to be healthy, creative, learn skills or create jobs.
- vii. Implement an innovative social value policy and toolkit that will not only provide resources for community projects and activities but also encourage real opportunities for our communities to benefit from the physical development and regeneration and some of our large contracts in the city, particularly to raise ambition and create skills and employment opportunities.
- viii. Working with the Gloucester Community Building Collective CIC, further strengthen community building activity across all parts of the City and support local people in the delivery of community led projects.
- ix. Re-designing the form and function of the relationship between the City Council and the VCS in Gloucester to ensure maximum support and knowledge transfer within the resource envelope we have
- x. Create a local mechanism where we work with other statutory organisations and create better and more bespoke support packages around people with vulnerabilities, linking them into local support networks where possible.
- xi. Supporting the City's community and voluntary sector to be digitally mature; in particular to support its development of capability and capacity in order to fulfil its mission. This action is linked to the City Council's digital strategy and will be scoped in more detail in the autumn.

3. How will we do it and who is involved?

Given that much of this work has to engage the wider community and several projects require inputs from partners, our proposal is to frame the recovery in the context of the work of the Stronger and Safer Gloucester Partnership, and to establish a Task and Finish Group, led by the City Council and with additional representation from the VCS.

The Task and Finish Group will have agreed terms of reference and is likely to include representatives of the following organisations:

- City Council (officer and member)
- Gloucestershire Constabulary
- Gloucester City Homes
- Early Help Partnership
- Gloucester Community Building Collective
- Gloucester Gateway Trust
- Representation from a Community Centre within the City
- VCS representation from Barton and Tredworth

We will have a project plan for each of the 10 projects. Each project will have an assigned lead officer, timescales and appropriate resources.

Anne Brinkhoff, Officer lead

Cllr Jennie Watkins, Councillor lead

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