



Voluntary Action
Arun & Chichester

healthwatch
West Sussex

Voluntary Sector Response to COVID 19



Voluntary Action Arun and Chichester and Healthwatch West Sussex are working together to support the Voluntary Sector during the Coronavirus pandemic

April 2020

Introduction

Recognising the tremendous pressure the Voluntary and Community Sector are experiencing as a result of the Coronavirus (COVID 19) Outbreak, Voluntary Action Arun and Chichester (VAAC) and Healthwatch West Sussex are working collaboratively to share information gathered on the challenges and concerns, but more importantly to understand how as a sector we learn from these experiences.

What we have learned is that Voluntary and Community Sector leaders have had a frenzied period of adjustment such as:

- closing face to face services, or changing services
- supporting staff and volunteers: reallocating staff to other roles and furloughing staff, taking care of volunteers
- finding innovative ways to shore up finances, and many other tasks and decisions.

As well as looking after their own and their family's needs. What has come through is a strong sense of responsibility.



Normally, things come along steadily and not as currently, being inundated all at once.



Within this report is a snapshot of views during a period of unprecedented change.



Healthwatch and COVID 19

Healthwatch West Sussex has asked our voluntary and community partners to support our work using social media and email contacts. [Insight into Action](#)

Our request is for you, your teams and clients to be the ‘eyes and ears’ of our communities to help to flag what is working well and where there are gaps and glitches within the provision and delivery of health and social care services in West Sussex. This will enable us to use our statutory powers to influence change and support services to make a positive difference for the residents you support and others.



VAAC and COVID 19

Voluntary Action Arun and Chichester is an organisation that promotes and supports voluntary and community groups, reflecting the voice of the voluntary sector across Arun and Chichester. We have actively engaged with our members to capture feedback on the challenges and changes to service delivery, staff, volunteers and fundraising they have made in light of COVID 19, to be able to provide appropriate support. We have reached out in the following ways:

- Contact with our members and partners by email and telephone, for updates and offer of support
- Town and Parish Councils have been contacted, as many are actively involved in co-ordinating resident support at the village level
- Regular e-bulletins, social media and direct follow up has been made
- Our Volunteering Good Practice has been updated, and so has our general information about current services being provided in the Arun and Chichester area
- Tracking supply and demand for volunteers
- Providing telephone and online support to volunteer co-ordinators
- Our staff have been keeping up to date with what is happening across the sector through the many different networks. Engaging and offering advice and support with many newly forming informal groups who are supporting their local neighbourhoods.
- Connecting strategically with West Sussex County Council, Chichester District Council, Arun District Council, voluntary and community services, public and private sector to ensure that VAAC is well informed and able to provide up to date and effective joined up information and responses.



We appreciate being contacted and offered support.
It is great to know that VAAC is there to support us.



The types of enquires VAAC has received include:

- Requests for information about GDPR and data protection particularly around working online, volunteers handling money, distribution of goods.
- Requests for information on Safeguarding for staff, volunteers and residents.
- Requests for information on funding, advice and support.
 - Volunteer information including recruiting and managing volunteers.



Reported Strengths

What has been obvious is how quickly the Voluntary and Community Sector has responded and adapted to the COVID 19 crisis and is playing a critical role at this time by providing frontline and essential services. Many are supporting vulnerable people alongside West Sussex County Council, Arun District Council, Chichester District Council, Community Hubs and Health services across the County.

“ Carers Support West Sussex has worked with West Sussex County Council and opened-up their response line to the wider community (not only carers), who may need guidance and assistance at this difficult time. They are offering low-level emotional support and active listening, contingency planning and practical advice, information and signposting. ”

Many in the voluntary sector have adapted or increased service provision to meet the needs and support to statutory services. This has been very evident within mental health to help reduce social isolation, homelessness, care and support for older people.

“ Groups are providing one-to-one telephone, email or online support and information to support individuals, families and carers.

There has also been a substantial increase in people stepping forward to offer their time in a volunteer capacity.

We have been hosting virtual pop-up events on Zoom every Tuesday and Thursday at 11am for an hour. They are very popular as parent carers do not have to leave home to feel supported and included. (West Sussex Parent Carer Forum.) ”

Neighbourhood Action

At a neighbourhood level, neighbours quickly formed groups, many before statutory responses had been established, to cover their immediate area and set up *WhatsApp* and *Facebook* groups under the umbrella of COVID Mutual Aid. Also, resident associations, churches, parish and town councils have been reaching out to their immediate community. These local groups have been willing to be part of the larger co-ordinated response and are part of the West Sussex County Council COVID 19 Hub. To ensure that there is a proactive response within public and health services which ensures seamless and effective complementary services for those who need it.



“ Manned telephone lines to respond quickly to enquiries from residents.

Our church pastoral team has been working hard to stay in touch with those socially isolated, especially those without the Internet.

We are not a support group, but we are using our email listing to pass on news, offers of help with shopping etc. and requests for help.

”

Sharing Skills

What has been evident is how much sharing of skills across organisations has occurred. This has ensured that communication between voluntary groups and local residents has been strengthened.

“ In many areas social media is being used to make people aware of what is happening.

Our website is our ‘go to’ resource.

”

Challenges and Concerns

There have been new challenges in managing teams, often at a distance - supporting and motivating staff, maintaining good communication channels and so on to support remote working. For voluntary and community groups there is constant concern of who is missing out or not being reached. But staff have stepped into new roles and taken on new responsibilities so that organisations can respond better to need.

Another area has been frontline services maintaining staffing levels and ensuring that the spread of COVID 19 is minimised for staff and those they support. Some frontline services, especially Care Homes staff have had to self-isolate at work and away from their families. It has been widely reported about the lack of appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and testing in Care Homes and other frontline services such as homeless organisations.

Keeping up with rapidly changing legislation and information relating to the provision of care, the need for staff to adapt quickly. Unfortunately, some have been hampered by the lack of clarity/information to be able to access the support that vulnerable people need as exemplified by visual impairment. Some of the accommodation-based services have not been ideal in minimising the spread of COVID 19. There is also a negative impact on older people’s services, homelessness services and for those with complex issues, such as drug and alcohol misuse.

For some organisations GDPR and data sharing has been an issue, particularly for those who have been advised to ‘shield’ and delays in setting up systems between sectors has slowed progress.



We are working closely with those who are homeless and have health conditions. Therefore, it is important that we have PPE to protect our workforce and clients.



A high number of VAAC member organisations have closed and are not providing any services as their support offer does not provide online or telephone services and therefore, they cannot adapt swiftly, or at all. This is likely to have a major impact on residents who have relied on their support and long-term future of such groups/organisations.

For those still able to provide services, many have seen an increase in demand, as COVID 19 has uncovered more complex and difficult cases, for example mental health and suicides. [COVID 19 has brought out the more challenging cases.](#)

There has been a significant reduction in services and activities for children and young people, [but many youth groups/organisations have adapted to virtual activities and meet-ups.](#) With most services now being telephone or internet based, it has been reported that for some children and young people they need permission to access home internet, and this may be leading to them feeling increasingly isolated and experiencing poor mental health, especially at this time of limited access to their network of friends.

Some of our youth organisations have reported receiving a steady flow of safeguarding concerns, particularly around young people’s welfare, and bereavement. A number of organisations have reported increased demand and financial unsustainability, which could lead to an increase in unmet needs once the COVID 19 crisis ends.

Contracts and Grants

Some organisations who have funding in place are concerned that they cannot meet the agreed outcomes for the contract and grant conditions. VAAC has provided support and advice on how to respond in these circumstances and to find other ways of meeting these obligations. Other organisation shared their appreciation of the flexibility shown by their current funders in response to the changes brought about by COVID 19.



“ Many of our funders have been very helpful and proactive and have asked us *what do we need?* ”

Some organisations with newly awarded grants and the pressure of uncertainty have had to make some tough decisions, *‘do you draw down or hold for the future?’*

COVID 19 lockdown has impacted negatively on fundraising planning, as charity shops, fayres, events and cafes etc. have been cancelled. This is causing anxiety across groups as to how to remain solvent. This is something that is affecting small and large organisations alike.

“ As a small organisation, we are constantly applying for grants and fundraising. We have seen grant-holders diverting funds towards the COVID 19 response, but this could lead to organisations not directly involved in responding to the crisis in financial trouble. ”

Volunteers

What has been great is the high number of people volunteering to support. However, currently there are more volunteers than placement opportunities. This is due in part to organisations needing certain skills and there is no capacity to train up volunteers, which has created a vicious cycle.

For organisations, such as Healthwatch West Sussex, we are using staff resources to check on the welfare of our existing volunteers (who largely fall into the retired category of residents) and finding new ways of staying in touch. What is clear from these calls is that for many, their energy is going on managing their health fears and coping with changes to their weekly routines/inability to focus on a routine for their week.

Next Steps

VAAC and Healthwatch West Sussex will continue to strategically engage across the different networks and work collaboratively with partners during the COVID 19 crisis.

Regular reporting on how COVID 19 is affecting the voluntary and community sector.

Continue to offer support and guidance to members and the wider voluntary and community sector. Including new groups emerging because of COVID 19.

Voluntary Action Arun and Chichester

In the light of the Government's latest advice on COVID-19 we have cancelled our events and training up until the end of June.

1-1 Support for Member Organisations

We recognise that this is a precarious time for many of our members, particularly those that rely on income from trading. We are here to support you and we will continue to do so through our referral system, by phone and email. We are making plans to work remotely which will not affect our support to groups. Please contact us by downloading our referral form from our [website](#).

Looking for volunteers during the Coronavirus crisis?

If you are extending your services into the community and need more volunteers, please let us know so we can advertise these roles. We are getting calls with regard to neighbourhood support and we want to signpost volunteers to our member organisations. If you need to update your volunteer policies, please get in touch with us for templates and guidance. <https://www.vaac.org.uk/volunteering>

Please check our website, social media and notices for up-to-date information.

<https://www.vaac.org.uk/>

Email: admin@vaac.org.uk

Telephone: Lucie Maldoom, Development Team Leader - 07751 246850

Follow us on

www.facebook.com/VAArunChi/

www.twitter.com/VAAC_Community

www.linkedin.com/company/vaac

Healthwatch is here to make care better

We are the independent champion for people who use health and social care services. We're here to find out what matters to people and help make sure their views shape the support they need. We also help people find the information they need about services in West Sussex.



Here to help you on the next step of your health and social care journey

You can review how we performed and how we report on what we have done by visiting our website www.healthwatchwestsussex.co.uk

Contact us



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Healthwatch West Sussex works with Help & Care to provide its statutory activities.