Bradford and District VCS Infrastructure Review: Sense-checking progress so far

Survey Report – March 2021

1.0 Background

In 2019, the City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council (CBMDC) and Bradford NHS CCG commissioned an independent review[1] to explore the existing infrastructure and support for the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCS) sector across Bradford District. The aim was to explore the views of stakeholders and partner organisations in order to understand, how to support the VCS in the future in terms of sustainability and maximising impact within the wider system.

Project Rome[1] published a report (2019), outlining the current provision with a set of recommendations for future commissions. The process included; a desk-top review of relevant documents, interviews, focus groups and a series of workshops with key stakeholders. The workshops were facilitated conversations about how to design whole system approaches, collaborate with the wider economy and embed the community voice.

However, the review process was stalled owing in part to a systems response to the Covid pandemic. In summer 2020, the VSC looked for a possible system lead or small team to support the next steps and conclusion of the VCS Infrastructure Review. Support has been provided by the Improvement and Clinical Outcomes (ICO) Lead at Bradford Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust (BTHFT) working with the VCS infrastructure review steering group.

In December 2020, following on from the initial workshops and findings from other recent consultations[2] an online survey was sent to relevant partners and stakeholders. The aim of the survey was to a) check if previously identified themes from the original reviews workshops were still relevant and b) capture any new issues or gaps owing to the impact of Covid 19 now being faced by stakeholder groups.

The aim of this report is to present the findings from the sense checking survey. Within the discussion, the recommendations from the original Project Rome report are revisited in light of any new findings.

2.0 Method

An online survey was co-developed using SurveyMonkey[TM] by the ICO lead and VCS steering group, consisting of 31 items. Survey questions explored the following areas:

- Findings from themed workshops – identified areas for development
- Issues identified by Race Equality Network (REN) and Bradford & District Community Empowerment Network (CNet)

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[1] Project Rome report (?2019) - Voluntary and Community Sector funding support in Bradford & District
[2] - Race Equality Network (REN) and Bradford & District Community Empowerment Network (CNet)
- Survey on VCS resilience in the light of Covid

- Issues identified from sector surveys on VCS resilience in the light of Covid

Potential participants were identified via the VCS infrastructure steering group. An introductory email was sent describing the purpose of the survey with a link with a reminder message sent before the closing date. The survey was sent to [insert number] members of the VCS community, partner organisations and funding bodies. The survey ran during December 2020 and closed on 8th January 2021.

2.1 Data Analysis

Data from the survey was analysed using survey monkey analytics. The items with the highest response options were highlighted in Tables 2, 3, and 4. A thematic analysis approach[3] was used to explore findings from free text responses. This involved reading and familiarisation with narrative comments, to develop codes and themes. The analysis was conducted independently by the ICO lead.

3.0 Findings

3.1 Key features of organisational responses (Questions 1-6)

Type of organisation

A total of 134 individuals responded from 78 organisations took part in the online survey. [Insert response rate based on data – by individual/organisation]. This included, 98 (73%) from the VCS sector, 8 (6%) from Social Enterprise, 11 (8) from the local Council, 13 (10%) from NHS organisations and 4 (2%) identified as other (See Figure 1).
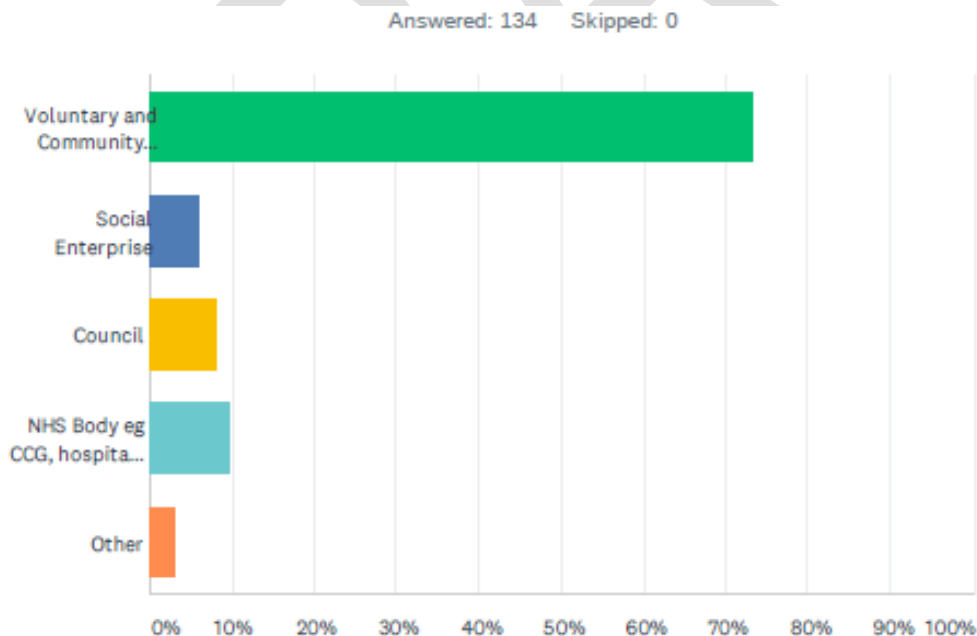

Figure 1: Types of organisations taking part in the survey

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[3] Braun V and Clarke V. Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qual Res Psychol 2006; 3: 77–101.

Key features of participating organisations

The majority of participants (84%) worked at organisations with paid staff and 45% (59) described being 'service user led'. In relation to organisations geographical focus, 91% (119) indicated that work was not isolated to a specific neighbourhood (See Table 1).

Of the 109 respondents that answered the question about 'protected characteristics that organisations focussed work upon', the main areas represented were, under 18's, 18-60, 60 and over and disability (See Figure 2).

Table 1: Key features of organisations

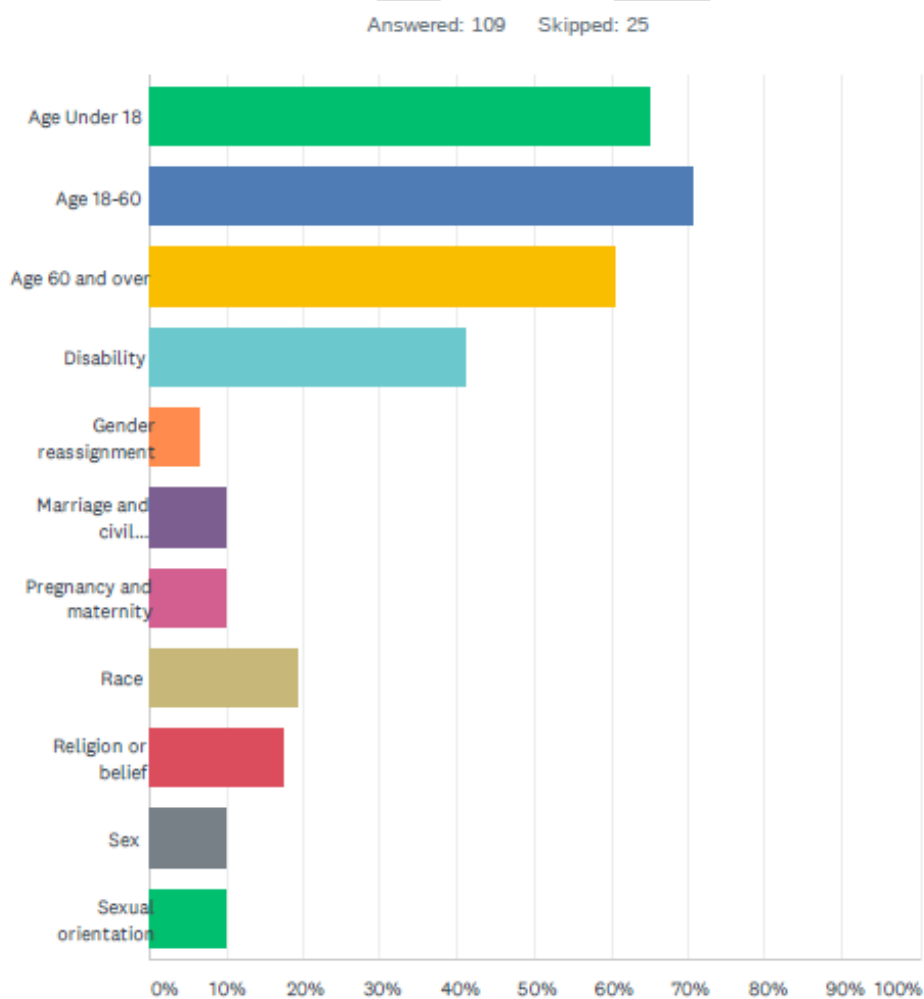| Key characteristics	Number or total responses	Number	Percentage
Run by volunteers	131	Yes - 21	16%
		No - 110	**84%**
Service user led	131	Yes - 59	45%
		No - 72	**55%**
Focus on a specific neighbourhood	131	Yes - 12	9%
		No - 119	**91%**

Figure 2 Organisational focus: protected characteristics

3.2 Survey responses – closed questions

The following section reports the results from responses to closed questions in the survey. Descriptive statistical analysis has been conducted using SurveyMonkey's ™ analytical tool. The results have been grouped into three sections with key points highlighted:

- Stakeholder themed workshops (See Table 2)
- Issues identified by Race Equality Network (REN) and Bradford & District Community Empowerment Network (CNet) (See Table 3)
- Sector surveys on VCS resilience in the light of Covid (See Table 4)

3.2.1 Stakeholder themed workshops – identified areas for development

(Questions 8, 13, 18, 22 and 28)

Key points:

- Overall, there is agreement with the need to move towards partnership forums and to review the current governance structure and processes within the VCS Assembly. This includes testing ideas, such as, creating a market place with brokering facilities and gathering and sharing information in real time using a single self-serve platform.

- There is agreement to increase participation from grass organisations to ensure 'voice and influence' (two key themes of work) are strengthened. This includes, developing Young people's representation and leadership within the VCS, insights to be fed into generating funding opportunities and developing a volunteer passport to facilitate people to move between organisations easily and safely.

- A systems approach towards learning and compassionate leadership, whilst creating a stronger culture of volunteering across the system was agreed.

Table 2: Stakeholder themed workshops

Items	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
VCS Assembly Forums to move from information sharing platforms primarily for VCS organisations to partnership forums formed of VCS and public sector partners	28.57% 22	41.56% 32	22.08% 17	5.19% 4	2.60% 2	77
Ensure greater participation from grassroots organisations by providing a variety of ways to engage and participate and have views heard	59.21% 45	35.53% 27	3.95% 3	0.00% 0	1.32% 1	76
To review the membership and governance processes of the Assembly Steering Group (VCS leadership)	39.74% 31	32.05% 25	25.64% 20	2.56% 2	0.00% 0	78
Clarify the different type of representative roles and the processes for appointing to different types of role	41.03% 32	37.18% 29	19.23% 15	2.56% 2	0.00% 0	78
Ensure there is dedicated paid staff support allocated to each voice & engagement theme/forum	37.18% 29	37.18% 29	19.23% 15	5.13% 4	1.28% 1	78

Establish protected characteristic sub groups to ensure that voice and influence work is relevant to the whole community	34.62% 27	35.90% 28	21.79% 17	7.69% 6	0.00% 0	78
To use an Asset Based Community Development approach to support community based activities	42.86% 33	28.57% 22	25.97% 20	2.60% 2	0.00% 0	77
Voice and Influence insight to be fed into generating external funding opportunities	46.05% 35	38.16% 29	13.16% 10	2.63% 2	0.00% 0	76
To develop Young People's leadership and representation within the VCS	48.00% 36	34.67% 26	13.33% 10	2.67% 2	1.33% 1	75
Source additional funding into Bradford District	58.06% 36	30.65% 19	11.29% 7	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	62
Increase capacity to support social enterprises to source funding and resources	37.10% 23	32.26% 20	29.03% 18	1.61% 1	0.00% 0	62
Ensure there is a joined up approach to funding and resourcing that incorporates local funders and grant giving bodies, support organisations, philanthropy, support from businesses and organisations bringing resource into the district.	56.45% 35	32.26% 20	9.68% 6	1.61% 1	0.00% 0	62
Develop a 'market place' that allows organisations to be part of wider funding opportunities	42.86% 27	41.27% 26	12.70% 8	1.59% 1	1.59% 1	63
Ensure an honest broker facility is in place that joins up partners in a transparent way without conflict of interest	58.06% 36	33.87% 21	6.45% 4	0.00% 0	1.61% 1	62
Offer paid for packages of support with managing contracts and managing outcomes and data to partnerships that have been formed through an honest broker arrangement and been successful in winning bids.	32.26% 20	20.97% 13	40.32% 25	3.23% 2	3.23% 2	62
Develop ways of gathering and sharing data in a real time way to help support efforts to bring money into the district and to support the development of partnership bids	53.97% 34	38.10% 24	7.94% 5	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	63
Use evidence from local and national work to demonstrate the benefits of a significant shift in funding from statutory to community provision.	50.00% 31	29.03% 18	19.35% 12	1.61% 1	0.00% 0	62
Assess the resources required to support two independent volunteer centres for the District and if this addresses current needs	24.59% 15	31.15% 19	34.43% 21	6.56% 4	3.28% 2	61
Move to a more time efficient model of volunteering brokerage and support to organisations	37.10% 23	25.81% 16	37.10% 23	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	62
Develop a group of volunteers who can help organisations build their capacity and provide training on organisational development.	33.33% 20	28.33% 17	21.67% 13	16.67% 10	0.00% 0	60
Renew the Volunteering Strategy across the district.	36.07% 22	22.95% 14	36.07% 22	4.92% 3	0.00% 0	61
Help organisations to achieve the People Can - Volunteering Quality Mark	33.87% 21	25.81% 16	29.03% 18	9.68% 6	1.61% 1	62
To develop a 'volunteer passport' to enable volunteers to transfer safely between organisations	39.34% 24	32.79% 20	24.59% 15	1.64% 1	1.64% 1	61
To broker joint volunteer co-ordinator roles (2 or more organisations share and pay for a single coordinator)	29.51% 18	19.67% 12	40.98% 25	6.56% 4	3.28% 2	61
Carry out focussed work supporting organisations around engaging with businesses around volunteering (the Corporate Social Responsibility agenda.)	35.48% 22	37.10% 23	25.81% 16	1.61% 1	0.00% 0	62
Drive forward a programme for local authority, health bodies, businesses and other organisations across the system to release their staff to volunteer.	32.79% 20	39.34% 24	21.31% 13	6.56% 4	0.00% 0	61

To develop an information service through a single platform	40.68% 24	28.81% 17	22.03% 13	5.08% 3	3.39% 2	59
To refresh and update the DIVA database for the VCS sector	31.67% 19	36.67% 22	28.33% 17	0.00% 0	3.33% 2	60
Build a diverse cohort of system leader	45.76% 27	25.42% 15	22.03% 13	3.39% 2	3.39% 2	59
Create systems of learning and compassionate leadership	43.10% 25	27.59% 16	24.14% 14	1.72% 1	3.45% 2	58
Create a self-serve single platform for organisations to support e-learning	39.66% 23	34.48% 20	17.24% 10	5.17% 3	3.45% 2	58
Conduct robust for specialist support to organisations	39.29% 22	25.00% 14	28.57% 16	1.79% 1	5.36% 3	56

3.2.2 Issues identified by Race Equality Network (REN) and Bradford & District Community Empowerment Network (CNet)

(Questions 10, 15, 20, 25, 30)

The following section reports on survey responses to questions based on research conducted by REN and CNet.

Key points:

- There is agreement for more opportunities for BAME organisations to come together to support each other, ensure representation at key stakeholder meetings, improve access to training and development for leaders and volunteers and the need for training and education about racism, cultural competence, and unconscious bias.

- There is agreement over needing support with key aspects of funding, such as, awareness of opportunities, help with writing funding bids and sustainability issues.

- ***Desire for change***

The response to Covid has identified the appetite for more creative approaches and challenging the old model of funding. There was a sense that after Covid things will return back to normal. However, it is emerging that CVS needs to embrace the chance for focussing on things that matter at a local level.

> *'…help existing VCS organisations 'think outside the box'. Unless these organisations adapt and change they will cease to exist. Many are just waiting for things to go back to normal, that might be a very long time and they need to think what their role is now and what they need to do differently. (R-06)*

Training was considered out dated and more support was needed to understand the bidding and commissioning process and managing a project rather than just getting though the application stage.

Respondents also noted that during the crisis it was small local community groups that addressed emerging needs and not the large national charities or VCS groups.

- ***Streamlining systems***

Suggestions included standardising policy and documents for organisations, sharing resources such as Human Resources (HR) requirements. This would avoid duplication of efforts and would also help support small groups with capacity issues:

> *'There are tasks that all community organisations have to do that could be done centrally to save time and duplication e.g. policies and updates. There should be a quality assurance system for all community centres which could be produced and managed by CVS, similar to the one conducted by the ward officers for all organisations receiving local authority funding.' (R-19).*

Table 3: Issues identified by REN and CNet

Items	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
More networking opportunities and events for BAME groups to get together, share information, support each other	37.66% 29	29.87% 23	25.9% 20	5.19% 4	1.30% 1	77
Ensure there are more ways to raise and address the issues and concerns shared by BAME groups and the communities they serve	46.75% 36	36.6% 28	15.58% 12	0% 0	1.3% 1	77
Form a BAME strategic advisory panel	34.21% 26	23.68% 18	39.47% 30	2.63% 2	0.00% 0	76
Ensure more BAME voices at key meetings and voices and representation from the black community	53.25% 41	28.57% 22	15.58% 12	1.30% 1	1.30% 1	77
Training for BAME leaders/potential leaders to take part in decision making	46.05% 35	40.79% 31	10.53% 8	1.32% 1	1.32% 1	76
Help with bid writing for groups that do not have the capacity	30.16% 19	47.62% 30	15.87% 10	3.17% 2	3.17% 2	63
Working with statutory partners on issues such as transparency of funding and ensuring sustainable funding and support	47.62% 30	36.51% 23	14.29% 9	0.00% 0	1.59% 1	63
Information about funding opportunities	47.54% 29	44.26% 27	8.20% 5	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	61
Funding support for small groups	43.55% 27	50.00% 31	6.45% 4	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	62
Support to recruit, train and retain volunteers	37.70% 23	34.43% 21	27.87% 17	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	62
Annual training review for volunteers	36.07% 22	29.51% 18	32.79% 20	0.00% 0	1.64% 1	61
Increased information, communication and networking to and with BAME organisations	33.90% 20	40.68% 24	20.34% 12	1.69% 1	3.39% 2	59
Develop ways to find out about other BAME groups, organisations and support services	30.51% 18	44.07% 26	22.03% 13	0.00% 0	3.39% 2	59
Support to market BAME groups and organisations	33.90% 20	42.37% 25	18.64% 11	1.69% 1	3.39% 2	59
Opportunities to pool information and share resources	42.11% 24	36.84% 21	19.30% 11	1.75% 1	0.00% 0	57

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
Education and understanding for all about black communities; their history and culture	46.55% 27	31.03% 18	20.69% 12	0.00% 0	1.72% 1	58
Training about racism, cultural competence, and unconscious bias	52.54% 31	15.25% 9	30.51% 18	0.00% 0	1.69% 1	59
Brokerage to help locate premises to operate from	37.29% 22	28.81% 17	30.51% 18	3.39% 2	0.00% 0	59
Organisational health checks	40.35% 23	36.84% 21	22.81% 13	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	57
Mentoring of smaller groups by larger ones	33.90% 20	38.98% 23	22.03% 13	3.39% 2	1.69% 1	59

3.2.3 Issues identified in sector surveys on VCS resilience and response to Covid

(Questions 9, 14, 19, 24, 29)

Issues identified VCS resilience and response to Covid.

Key Points:

- Responding to a crisis - There was agreement over the need to ensure that the VCS should be at the centre of decision making at a systems level, the volunteering route is simplified and support is given to community organisations. This includes Support with IT, digital and virtual working.

- Co-coordinating information between the council, health and social care and messaging to communities was important.

- There was strong agreement over the need to support the mental health of staff.

Table 4: Issues identified in surveys on VCS resilience and response to Covid

Items	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
Ensuring that the VCS can be at the heart of decision making and influence responses in times of crisis and recovery. Ensuring the structures and processes support this and can respond flexibly.	55.26% 42	28.95% 22	11.84% 9	2.63% 2	1.32% 1	76
Ensuring Commissioners and funders are flexible to changing circumstances	57.14% 36	38.10% 24	4.76% 3	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	63
Supporting financial recovery during and post Covid	57.14% 36	33.33% 21	7.94% 5	1.59% 1	0.00% 0	63
Clear and easy ways for people to volunteer in response to emergencies or crises	50.00% 31	35.48% 22	11.29% 7	3.23% 2	0.00% 0	62
Support to local community response groups	40.98% 25	42.62% 26	13.11% 8	3.28% 2	0.00% 0	61
Co-ordinated information and communication with council, health and other partners	51.67% 31	33.33% 20	10.00% 6	5.00% 3	0.00% 0	60
Co-ordination of community messaging and information	45.00% 27	38.33% 23	10.00% 6	5.00% 3	1.67% 1	60
Interpretation of national and local policy and guidance explaining how it affects VCS organisations	45.76% 27	35.59% 21	13.56% 8	5.08% 3	0.00% 0	59

Support with IT, digital and virtual working (equipment, skills, connectivity of clients, organisations, staff and volunteers)	49.15% 29	35.59% 21	11.86% 7	3.39% 2	0.00% 0	59
Mental health and resilience of staff and volunteers	51.72% 30	36.21% 21	12.07% 7	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	58
Interpretation of regulations and policy guidance	32.76% 19	50.00% 29	17.24% 10	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	58

3.3 Open-ended questions

The online survey asked a number of open ended questions about areas of work by the VCS. The following section presents key themes with supporting extracts from respondents. The responses have been anonymised (R=Respondent).

3.3.1 Question 7

> Question 7: What do you think currently works well in terms of voice and influence and you wouldn't want to see lost or cease?

- ***Voices being heard***

The current structure has allowed people to feel that there are opportunities to have voices heard across the system. Through forums and meetings where representative organisations participate in conversations, they feel they are able to *'channel' (*R-03) voices to other stakeholders:

> *'It is important that people are given a voice to implement changes.' (R-01)*

> *'The voices of communities, young, adult and elderly are vital in shaping how we deliver our services.' (R-31)*

The Bradford VCS Assembly, which is the 'Voice and Influence' part of the infrastructure provides a number of Forums for groups to meet. This was seen as a '*good way of bringing people together and share ideas and information' (R-15).* At the same time grass root organisations wanted the Assembly to be more '*visible*' *(R-7)* to smaller charities, expressing that they '*hardly hear what is going on' (R-32).*

Community groups felt that there was a good sense of voice and influence when there was service user involvement, two-way conversations, rapid feedback and communication from larger supportive organisations and access to people within the system.

> *'RACE EQUALITY NETWORK and CNET keep us in the loop. We are getting quick and professional updates on a daily basis.' (R-3).*

- ***Being connected***

Being connected to others was seen as an important part of having a voice and influence. Smaller organisations described feeling uncertain about the value of the VCS Assembly and

that there was little connection to larger groups. This meant that for some organisations they felt voices got lost and little was translated into direct action:

> *'What is needed: a voice that can be heard and is not lost in the larger but often different conversations about urban areas'(R-44)*

> *'Young people have been consulted so often yet nothing changes… Despite the legal duty on local authorities to secure "sufficient" activities for young people, many of them have nothing to do (even pre-COVID).'*

There is an opportunity to become better connected, improve communications and coming together as a community.   Centralising information for everyone to access my address some of the current concerns of things being 'messy'. Coming together with more visibility from the VCS assembly were considered positive possibilities.

> *'Need to build up the voice of community health provision by encouraging collaboration- VCS alliance could be a good vehicle for this.' (R-06)*

3.3.2 Question 11

Question 11: Are there any other issues that you think should be prioritised?   These may be issues that have been raised during the response to Covid-19 or since the original workshops that have affected 'Voice and Influence'.

- *Learning*

The theme of learning related to the VCS response to Covid-19. Respondents described a lack of co-ordination, issues over funding and the need for clear leadership during the pandemic. The need for training to develop leaders across the sector was identified. The comment from one respondent summarises the key learning highlighted with the sectors response during Covid:

> *'The pandemic highlighted that the VCS is not coordinated in its approach - amongst the great work there were many examples of duplication and overlap. There are too many VCS lead organisations - there needs to be a recognised channel for sharing information and coordinating responses. (R-09)*

Learning also helped to inform what was needed in the future. Streamlining systems and reducing bureaucracy could improve the process to collaborate. Organisations need to develop closer links with communities that they represent and strengthen connections across the system.

- *Diversity and Inclusion*

The call for more diversity and inclusion included the need to improve reaching seldom heard voices, with the idea of minorities within minority groups not being represented:

'I feel that the people least benefitting from services are not engaged with as they are the minority within the minority groups!' (R-03)

'The current Forum structure is ineffective and attended by a minority group. Staffing and resource needs to be designated to driving agendas forwards and support linkages, projects and priority setting. They can't be reliant on voluntary Chairs who have day jobs. The topics need to allow for more cross cutting work.' (R-11)

Roles within the volunteer sector meant those with full time work find it difficult to make meetings and fulfil roles without working excessive hours:

'I'm writing these responses after 9pm at night. When opinions are heard or decisions made only at meetings (often happening during the school/working day), you exclude many people, especially real volunteers' (R-07)

The idea of increasing paid roles within the VCS sector was seen on one hand as novel idea and simultaneously not in keeping with the spirit of being a volunteer.

- *Mental Health*

The issue identified as a key priority to be addressed was the need for more Mental Health support especially for young people and older adults. The population in Bradford is unusual with a large number of young and older adults both facing mental health issues and both equally needing voice and influence within the system. The following extracts highlights the issue:

'…increase access to mental health support for Children and Young People.' (R-22)

'I feel that older people have got lost their voice over the past few years and I would like to see' (R-34)

3.3.3 Question 12

Question 12: What do you think currently works well in terms of VCS resourcing and you wouldn't want to see lost or cease?

- *Funding opportunities*

Community Action Bradford & District (CABAD) and Bfunded were recognised as useful resources to identify funding opportunities. However smaller organisations wanted more than advice, with support with applying for small grants.

Respondents described positive experiences approaching the VCS Alliance. However, a conflict of interests was identified with larger supporting organisations often bidding for the same funding streams as smaller grass root groups.

- *Mixed understanding*

'It's a confusing picture to work with this should be under one roof if at all possible' (R-04)

This extract highlights the feeling about smaller organisations describe how funding and resources are accessed. There appears to be a decrease in the level of hands-on support that was given previously, and a lack of strategies for monitoring how funds are used by groups. There is also a mixed perception over current VCS resourcing by VCS organisations demonstrated in the comments below:

> *'The VCS Alliance only funds its own members so don't trust them. CABAD supports the big names only. So they all get more funding.'* (R-34)

> *'CABAD is great at sharing opportunities and providing support to those smaller organisations to secure bids - would want more hands on support to 'do the doing' with individuals rather than just giving advice.'* (R-42)

This may imply that there are opportunities and support with regard to funding and resourcing but the message may not be reaching all groups.

3.3.4 Question 16

> Question 16: Are there any other issues that you think should be prioritised? These may be issues that have been raised during the response to Covid- 19 or since the original workshops that have affected 'VCS resourcing'.
>
> What do you think currently works well in terms of volunteering support and you wouldn't want to see lost of cease?

- *Recruitment*

The respondent described how volunteering support could be improved rather than what currently works well. There was the acknowledgement that volunteering was often unpredictable with people *'very rarely coming up with the goods'* (R-13). Managing recruitment was also difficult with some organisations using local networks to make better use of time to identifying potential volunteers.

- *Development opportunities*

There were ideas to develop the recruitment and retention of volunteers. This included, making it easier to find volunteering roles, see what is available and to create a pool of volunteers. In addition, providing advice and guidance to people wishing to volunteer, promoting the benefits of volunteering, such as, gaining work experience and encouraging organisations to adopt the volunteering quality kitemark were seen as positive moves to strengthen volunteering.

3.3.6 Question 21

> Are there any other issues that you think should be prioritised? These may be issues that have been raised during the response to Covid-19 or since the original workshops that have affected 'volunteering'.

Covid-19 has presented challenges to the system and highlighted that the volunteering strategy is outdated:

'Develop a new, more effective volunteering platform for Bradford & district' (R-12)

There were issues about protecting the health of volunteers, so that it was difficult to use volunteers in the traditional way. The impact is that volunteers will have been lost over the past year. There was also the recognition that digital structures needed to be improved to overcome barriers and challenges of working virtually. The cost of training for organisations was also identified as a barrier:

'Getting rid of the ESFA £500,000 minimum contract, which excludes all small training providers from public training funds.' (R-14)

3.3.7 Question 23

> What do you think currently works well in terms of information and insight and you wouldn't want to see lost or cease?

- ***Co-ordinating flow of information***

There appear to be numerous newsletters, bulletins and websites that provide essential information about funding, training and information about work from VCS groups across the system. DIVA Bradford was seen as a useful free searchable directory on voluntary and community sector groups from across Bradford District, job vacancies and a place to advertise events for the sector in Bradford. For smaller organisations, they wanted relevant information and using social media was easier to share key details and information. Overall, there was the sense of wanting to pull information into one platform and was easy to navigate.

'…we do just need one [platform] for the district and then resource to keep it up to date.' (R-22).

3.3.8 Question 26

> Are there any other issues that you think should be prioritised? These may be issues that have been raised during the response to Covid-19 or since the original workshops that have affected 'information and insight'.

- ***Equality and Voice***

There was a sense that all VCS organisations should be perceived and treated as equal in terms of access to support, funding and training opportunities moving forward.

- ***Legacy of Covid***

The response to Covid-19 still continues with organisations raising concerns over how to continue to support people and providing services as the District recovers for the health and social impacts of the pandemic.

The idea of pooling insight and data (big data) to support better learning, identifying wider trends and themes was seen as positive way to 'Work as One'.

> '[A] dedicated team managing the comms and messaging around insight specifically – data management and presentation, could really speed up organisational understanding of emerging trends and challenges (and possibly help identify early partnership opportunities around specific' (R-08)

3.3.9 Question 27

> What do you think currently works well in terms of capacity building and insight and you wouldn't want to see lost or cease?

- ***Employment and Training***

Training was very welcomed but there was a mixed response in terms of what worked well. This ranged from wanting face-to face and bespoke training and needs assessment at an individual organisational level and some favouring virtual sessions owing to geographical positions.

Organisations also wanted to simplify recruitment and offer paid job roles to attract younger adults to build capacity and capability for youth leaders.

> 'Ease of employing young adults part-time (e.g. via Bradford Community Payroll) so that they can be mentors/leaders to younger people whilst earning as much as they would do by working in a bar or supermarket.' (R-07)

- ***Purchasing Power***

The opportunity for smaller organisations and groups to work together to procure arrangements with providers for items, such as, utilities was identified.

3.3.10 Question 31

> Question 31: Are there any other issues that you think should be prioritised?

It was acknowledged that there was plenty of advice and guidance available. Ideas with regard to addressing capacity issues included thinking about different ways of working, focussing on governance and sharing administrative tasks:

> '…Consideration of brokering joint back office functions, and joint purchasing, support to bring organisations together to look at different operating models [and] legal structures.' (R-07).

This also extended to the potential power of being able to negotiate contracts for utilities for multiple organisations and groups.

The issue of training was highlighted as an issue, with suggestions of a shared calendar for all with regard to training opportunities across the district. The need for specialist training was identified, for example:

> '…we need volunteers who have higher level Sign Language skills…who can drive a minibus …who can lead groups out of doors.' (R-09)

'I don't see anything about the importance of safeguarding priorities and training across the VCS as the increased incidence of, for instance Domestic Violence has become apparent.' (R-06)

Finally, the offer of broadening the understanding and heritage of Roma communities was extended to groups across the VCS.

> 'There is very little awareness among stakeholders about the cultural and historical background of Roma communities which we are happy to contribute with' (R-01)

4.0 Discussion

The aim of the survey was to sense check previously identified themes from the original infrastructure review[1] and capture any new issues for the VCS owing to the impact of Covid-19.

The key findings were:

- Overall agreement on moving towards partnership forums and to review current governance structure and processes within the VCS Assembly

- Equality - creating opportunities for BAME organisations and smaller community groups to support each other and increase participation to ensure 'voice and influence' is strengthened

- Improve affordability and access to training and development for leaders, staff and volunteers within the VCS

- Support organisations with key aspects of funding e.g. awareness of opportunities, help with writing funding bids and addressing sustainability issues

- Streamlining systems – this includes sharing information and using 'big data' to inform systems thinking and work priorities

- System Response to a crisis - the VCS should be at the core of decision making process and recognised for the vital work from smaller community groups can play

- Ideas to test:

  o Creating a market place with brokering facilities

  o Sharing information in real time using a single self-serve platform

o Developing a volunteer passport to facilitate people to move between organisations easily and safely

o Adopting the volunteering quality kitemark as a standard for VSC organisations

5.0 Conclusion

The findings of this survey reflect some of the earlier recommendations from Project Rome (See Box 1). Modernising the support structure remains a focus for stakeholders and partner organisations. However, the survey highlights specific issues being faced by grass root community groups, BAME organisations and larger VCS supporting structures, in terms of voice and influence, feeling connected training and education needs and streamlining approaches to thinking and working.

Contextual issues were raised in the Project Rome report and need to be considered in relations to any new evidence and consultation processes that have been undertaken since the original review. These were:

- Whilst some VSC organisations were well led and flourished, some organisations were 'in deep financial' and 'governance trouble'
- There was a 'majority voice' for 'radical and meaningful changes to the way the support infrastructure is delivered'
- The most successful VCO providers are those who comply to 'public sector norms' and the system is at risk of losing 'innovative practice' and 'entrepreneurial spirit'

There are clear opportunities to 'Act as One' and think more creatively about all available support across the system, for example, tapping into Acute Health Care providers to access leadership training. Pooling resources for smaller organisations, in terms of people, spaces, vehicles, procurement processes may all serve to help the VCS to feel more connected to the whole system.

In essence the three principles outlined in Project Rome report are still echoed from the findings from this survey. Ideally, when agreeing the specifications for the future VCS infrastructure the following should considered:

1) Public Sector and VCS to work together to agree a shared vision and set of values

2) Bring all public sector VCS support spend together to maximize improvement impact and reduce overheads - 'Do things once' approach

3) Bradford First - Spending money within the District, thinking about local solutions is but, only when it is equal or better quality and price to an external offer.

Box 1

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared potential conflicts of interest – Employed by BTHFT but is not involved with any VCS organisations personally of professionally, and received no funding for this survey.