



Attended by over 15 members, the Forum provided an opportunity for members to share their experience and learnings on dealing with Coronavirus.

The Forum kicked-off with a discussion, led by Rob Netherway, Flourishing Community Services Manager at Witton Lodge Community Association. Established in 1994 by residents in Perry Common, an area of North Birmingham, Witton Lodge is both a Community Association and Community Landlord.

Engaging and reaching isolated people

- The community has a critical role in building and maintaining connections, now and in the future.
- the most marginalised in society, have been further marginalised, and the least resilient are suffering the most. Social isolation, service restrictions and fear are key drivers of this.
- Meaningful engagement with vulnerable and isolated communities to truly understand their needs, views, opinions and experience is critical throughout service development, delivery and refinement.
- ward-based delivery of services can help to ensure services are better tailored to local needs e.g. culture-specific food parcels
- Having a physical base in a community can add significant value to volunteers, delivering services such as food distribution, and residents.

Mutual Aid Groups

- Systems need to be in place to support continuation of community mobilisation and the volunteers coming through the Mutual Aid Groups. People also need to be supported through:
 - formal training
 - digital training
 - team building
 - recognition and reward

- Sustaining volunteering will need funding and staff to lead this; need to overcome the fact that some people are paid for supporting volunteers and others aren't

Partnerships

- Drawing on established partnerships supports the delivery of better services at speed; partnerships must be developed if they are not already established
- Collaboration, planning and good co-ordination are critical; everyone needs to understand their organisational and individual role within this and be held accountable for delivery
- Housing associations are a critical partner, however, those in private accommodation should not be neglected
- Social prescribing link workers are uniquely placed to understand and work within the different cultures across healthcare, housing, community etc

Virtual/Digital Services

- Developing virtual services has been critical to delivering established services to communities e.g. Job Clubs, IT Training
- Significant effort is needed in engaging the elderly, isolated and vulnerable in use of digital services, including training and the provision of IT equipment
- Phone and more traditional approaches to outreach (e.g. leafletting) is important in engaging those who cannot or will not use digital

Emerging issues and future planning

- Addressing increase in domestic violence
- Addressing mental health challenges
- Building digital inclusion
- Tackling longer-term loneliness
- Maintaining and establishing new referral pathways – GP, pharmacy, social workers, housing
- Working with schools
- Using data and insight gained through COVID-19 crisis to inform future planning
- Retaining volunteers in system
- Planning for end of Furlong
- Supporting safeguarding of isolated and vulnerable communities

Summary of 5 May 2020 Forum

- Connected communities are more resilient
 - COVID-19 has broken down barriers and increased goodwill.
 - The community can plug statutory service gap
 - Having a physical space adds significant value
 - Availability, responsiveness and being yourself are key
 - Integrated communication is central to success
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