# The Community Care Hub Network throughout Covid-19:

## Executive Summary

## 27 July 2022

This is the executive summary of a report that explores learnings from research into Leeds' Community Care Hub response to Covid-19 conducted between March and November 2021. The research and report writing were conducted by Leeds Social Sciences Institute, at the University of Leeds, and published by LeedsACTS! and Voluntary Action Leeds.
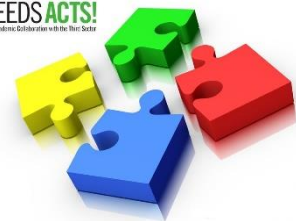
## Executive Summary

This report explores learnings from research into Leeds' Community Care Hub response to Covid-19 conducted between March and November 2021.

The Hub network consisted of locally based third sector organisations in each Ward that co-ordinated the delivery of key emergency provision (e.g., food parcels, prescriptions, welfare calls). Voluntary Action Leeds provided support to the network and acted as a connector to statutory partners, notably Leeds City Council. The research was conducted through a series of interviews with practitioners from a sample group of seven Hubs (chosen as a cross-section of differing neighbourhood and organisation characteristics) and senior officers from both Voluntary Action Leeds and Leeds City Council. It focused primarily on how the pandemic effected the organisational culture of Hub organisations.

## Key Learnings and Themes

Hub relationships with communities and the wider third sector

- All Hubs interviewed felt the experience of delivering emergency response created a closer relationship with the communities in which they work
    - In some cases, Hubs found that delivering emergency response (in particular emergency food) revealed previously unrecognised deprivation

- In some cases, Hubs developed new relationships with third sector organisations in their neighbourhoods – 2 Hub organisations formed a new, time limited partnership whilst another invested in a local organisation better placed to deliver a food response. However, the intensity of Covid-19 delivery meant that many Hubs had limited capacity to develop new relationships with and/or deepen their existing relationships with other third sector organisations in their neighbourhood.

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Hub relationships with Voluntary Action Leeds and the statutory sector

- All Hubs interviewed were positive about the support provided by VAL.

- However, some Hubs reported a lack of clarity from both VAL and statutory partners about how long the expected commitment to being a Hub would continue. VAL and statutory partners reported that this lack of clarity was caused by the dynamic circumstances of the pandemic response.

- Most of the Hubs interviewed reported that they lacked the capacity to fully engage in regular information exchange meetings and some questioned the value of these meetings.

- Hubs reported that the trust-based investment and monitoring arrangements established for the network enabled them to shape delivery to local circumstances and to flexibly meet need.

Learning from implementation of, and service delivery through, the network (volunteering)

- All but one of the Hubs interviewed relied upon, and highly valued, the contribution of volunteers. Some Hubs reported that the positive volunteering response from the people of Leeds had, at least for a time limited period, significantly changed the demographic characteristics of their volunteers.

- VAL led the initial call for volunteers and established vetting and deployment arrangements. They reported that at the outset they found responding to demand challenging, but that they have established new systems and processes that could be quickly rolled out in a future emergency response.

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- Many of the Hubs would have welcomed greater day to day third party resources around managing volunteers. These Hubs felt that VAL was the best placed organisation to provide this support.

## Learning from implementation of, and service delivery through the network (Food distribution)

- The system for food distribution developed to become a structured referral arrangement between the Council managed Leeds Welfare Support Service (LWSS) and the Hub network. The referral system operated in the context of increased need for emergency food during the pandemic and what some Hubs perceived to be previously unknown food insecurity.

- For some Hubs, differences in culture between the LWSS and Hubs and/or a perceived disconnect between reasons for referral and circumstances on the ground were a point of tension.

- Other Hubs valued the application of the centralised referral framework, which gave them confidence that they were directing emergency food resources where it was most needed.

- Some Hubs reported incidents of staff and volunteers profiling community members and making assumptions about their need/eligibility for emergency food. The LWSS referral system minimised the number and impact of these incidents.

## The impact on organisations and the future of the network

- The Hubs' capacity to reflect on the impact of the pandemic on their organisation culture and direction was limited by the fact that they were (unexpectedly) still in

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the delivery phase at the time the research was conducted.

- Most Hubs saw their pandemic work as informed by their community practice but essentially time limited.

- One Hub, with access to its own community building and pre-existing strategy to provide a broad-based range of community led services, found their work during the pandemic led them to re-assess their approach.

- Whilst the diversity of the Hub network was recognised as a key strength, the fact that Hub organisations worked in different places, at different scales, and had different pre-pandemic beneficiaries, led to some Hubs feeling less heard in discussions.

- Around half of the organisations interviewed wished to further explore how learning from the Hub network could be taken forward.  A number of areas were raised by the Hubs where greater clarity was needed, including:
    - work to develop a shared sense of purpose and definition of roles and responsibilities
    - the process for becoming a Hub and for engaging with the wider ecosystem of third sector organisations in each neighbourhood
    - the range and scope of services that might be delivered through a continued network

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## Key recommendations

- Future emergency responses should build on the learning from the Hub network and continue to see place-based third sector organisations as a critical contributors to meeting community needs.

- In a future emergency response, statutory partners and connector/facilitator organisations should seek greater clarity in their communication with local partners.

- Consideration should be given to training around volunteer management and inclusive practice before future emergencies take place.

- Consideration should be given to a campaign to address negative views about who accesses emergency food and why.

- Consideration should be given to developing new mechanisms for trust-based commissioning, based on delivery of a small set of broad outcomes/outputs.

- Discussions about the continuation of the network and/or a successor approach should establish shared purpose about the scope, roles and responsibilities, and inclusion of the wider eco-system of third sector organisations.

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