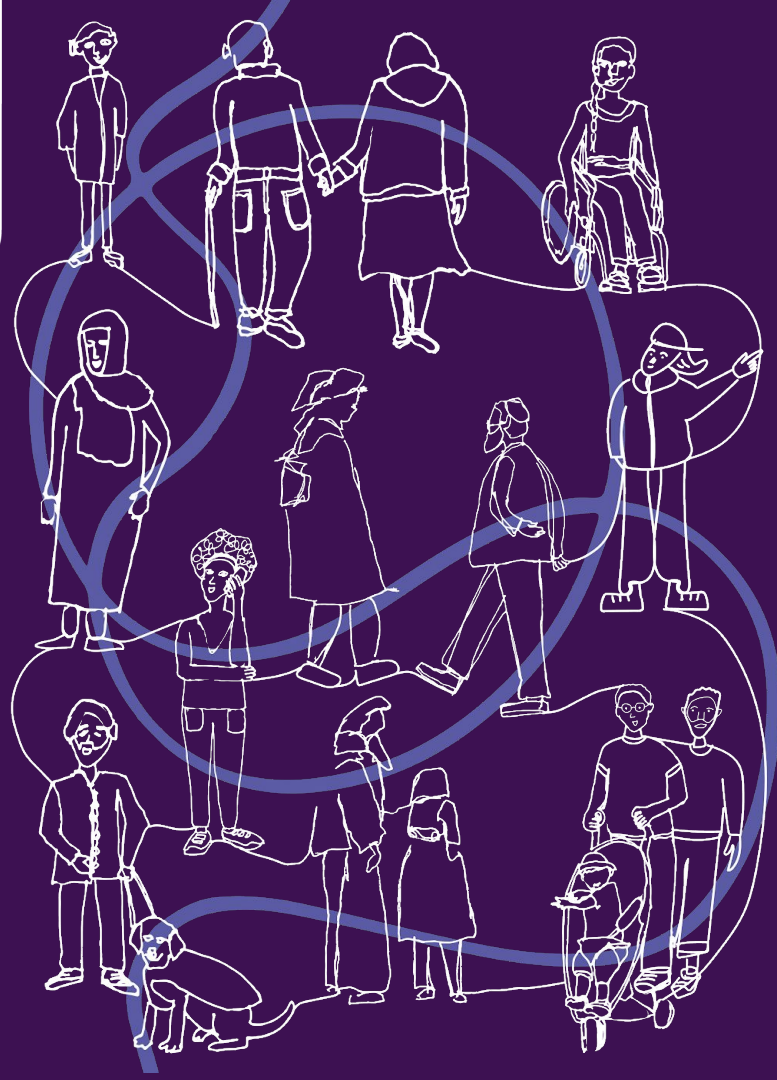


# Community Health and Wellbeing

**Sustaining and strengthening the role of  
community organisations beyond the initial  
Covid-19 response**

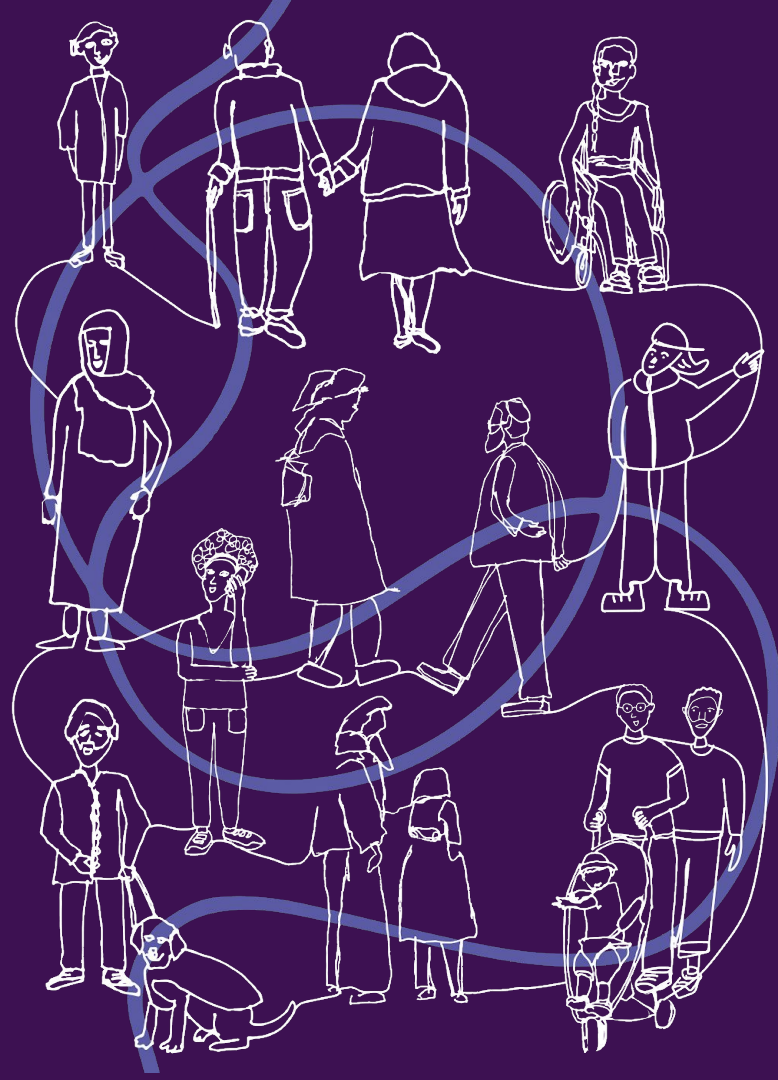
April 2021



# Contents:

1. **Setting the scene**
2. **Our approach**
3. **The role of community organisations** in supporting people's health and wellbeing during Covid-19
4. What **key factors** enabled a positive response to Covid-19?
5. **What needs to happen** to sustain and scale positive shifts?

# 1. Setting the scene



# A need to understand the changing role of community organisations in the Covid-19 response

## Responding to a changing context

In the summer of 2020 there was an acknowledgment that Covid-19 was significantly impacting on statutory service provision. Across Scotland local statutory and community services were working together to rapidly respond to the changing context. New ideas and ways to support people's health, wellbeing and social care needs were being identified and there was a growing recognition of the distinct and critical role that community organisations were playing to meet people's health and wellbeing needs during the crisis.

To learn from this changing context the [People Powered Results](#) (PPR) team at Nesta were commissioned by [Healthcare Improvement Scotland](#)'s Improvement Hub (ihub) to **gather insights and learning from across Scotland to help understand what would be needed to sustain, strengthen and grow community organisations' role in supporting people's health and wellbeing in the longer term.**

This document is part of a series of reports and recommendations that Healthcare Improvement Scotland's ihub are sharing with Scottish Government and others to **shape and inform the Adult Social Care Review**. The PPR team at Nesta have included a series of key takeaways and recommendations in this report. These are for both those at local and national level to consider how to implement new ways of working to sustain and scale community organisations' role in supporting people's health and wellbeing.

## 2. Our approach

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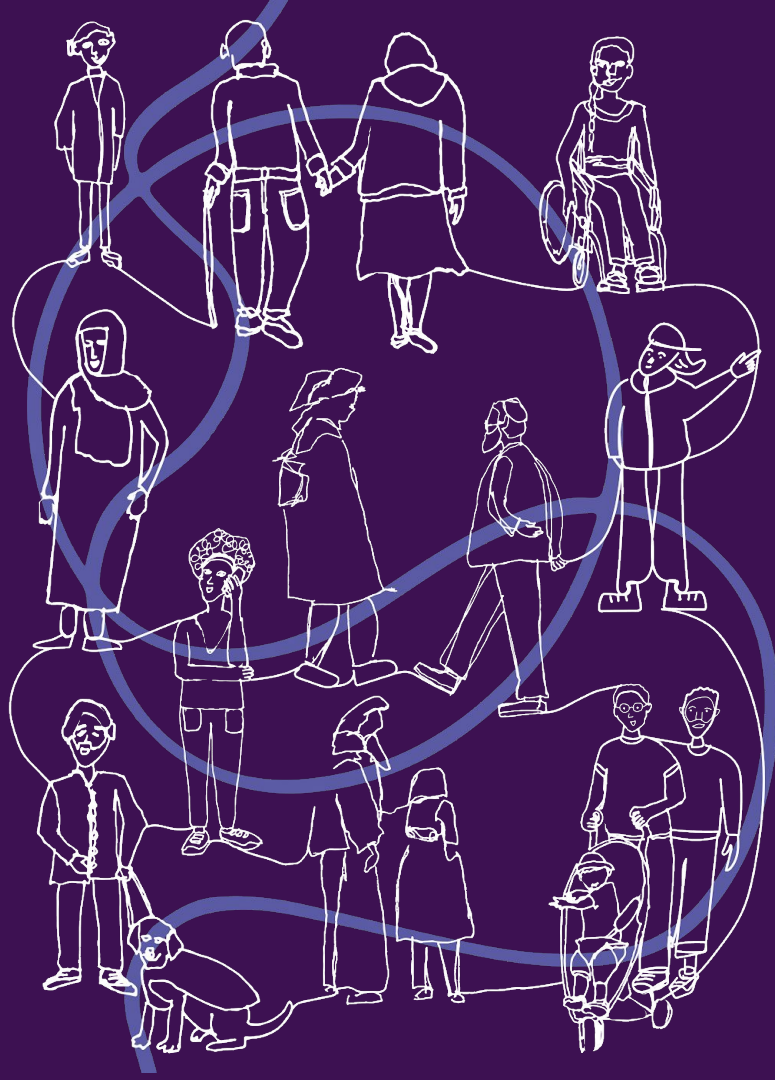
Who did we hear from?

2

How did people participate?

3

What did we hear?



# Who did we hear from?



**133 people** participated from **106 organisations**:

**45 community organisations:** incl. local food banks, hubs, faith-based organisations and wellbeing programmes

**20 local citizens and activists**

**14 national charities:** incl. Amina, Alzheimer Scotland, Carr Gomm, Macmillan, Parkinsons UK, Rowan Alba and Trussell Trust

**8 Third Sector Interface Organisations**

**4 community forums and networks**

**4 Local Authorities:** incl. City of Edinburgh, Dundee and East Ayrshire

**3 Health and Social Care Partnerships**

**2 community transport organisations**

**4 cultural institutions:** incl. University of Aberdeen, Edinburgh and V&A Dundee

# How did people participate?

We gathered a diverse set of perspectives from community organisations and other stakeholders through a range of different methods, taking an open approach and offering multiple opportunities for people to share their views.

## Place-based workshops

In January 2021 we invited community organisations and citizens to join us in one of **5 virtual workshops**, each focused on a different place and surrounding area in Scotland. We sought to hear from a mix of rural and urban community organisations about their experience of supporting different communities' health and wellbeing needs.

**103 people** participated

## Survey

We invited workshop participants to share further reflections on what was helping and getting in the way of supporting local people's health and wellbeing needs, including how funding flexibility and availability may be helping or hindering them.

**28 people** responded

## National event

We invited community organisations and national stakeholders to join us at a national event in early March. Here we shared what we heard so far, asked people to reflect on how this matched with their experience, and what they think is needed to value, nurture and grow community organisation's work going forward.

**47 people** participated

# What did we hear?

Community organisations played a **distinct and crucial role supporting people's health and wellbeing** during Covid-19, by:

Tuning into  
communities'  
changing needs

Rapidly reshaping  
support to meet  
changing needs

Mobilising  
community response



They were **supported by statutory organisations and national bodies**, who provided:

Opportunity to  
participate in local  
strategic planning

Flexible reporting  
and governance  
mechanisms

New ways of funding  
and delivering support  
for communities

**Underpinned by growing trust between community organisations and statutory services.**

The illustration and themes outlined here are based on the experiences people and community organisations shared during the workshops and events we held between January-March 2021.



# Key content: the story so far

These are key headlines on the role we heard community and statutory organisations played during Covid-19. The final section of this document will highlight what needs to happen next to strengthen and sustain these roles.

Community organisations played an **distinct and crucial role supporting people's health and wellbeing** during Covid-19, by:

## Tuning into communities' changing needs

- Providing an enhanced understanding of local contexts
- Building on trusting relationships to holistically understand and respond to what matters to people

## Rapidly reshaping support to meet changing needs

- Providing a stronger link between different services and communities
- Being agile in how responding to emergent gaps and unmet needs
- Offering an alternative to stretched statutory services

## Mobilising community response

- Mobilising large numbers of volunteers
- Forming effective partnerships to share assets and resources

They were **supported during Covid-19 by statutory organisations and national bodies**, who provided:

## Opportunity to participate in local strategic planning

- Involved community organisations more in local strategic planning
- Invested in strengthening relationships with community organisations

## Flexible reporting and governance mechanisms

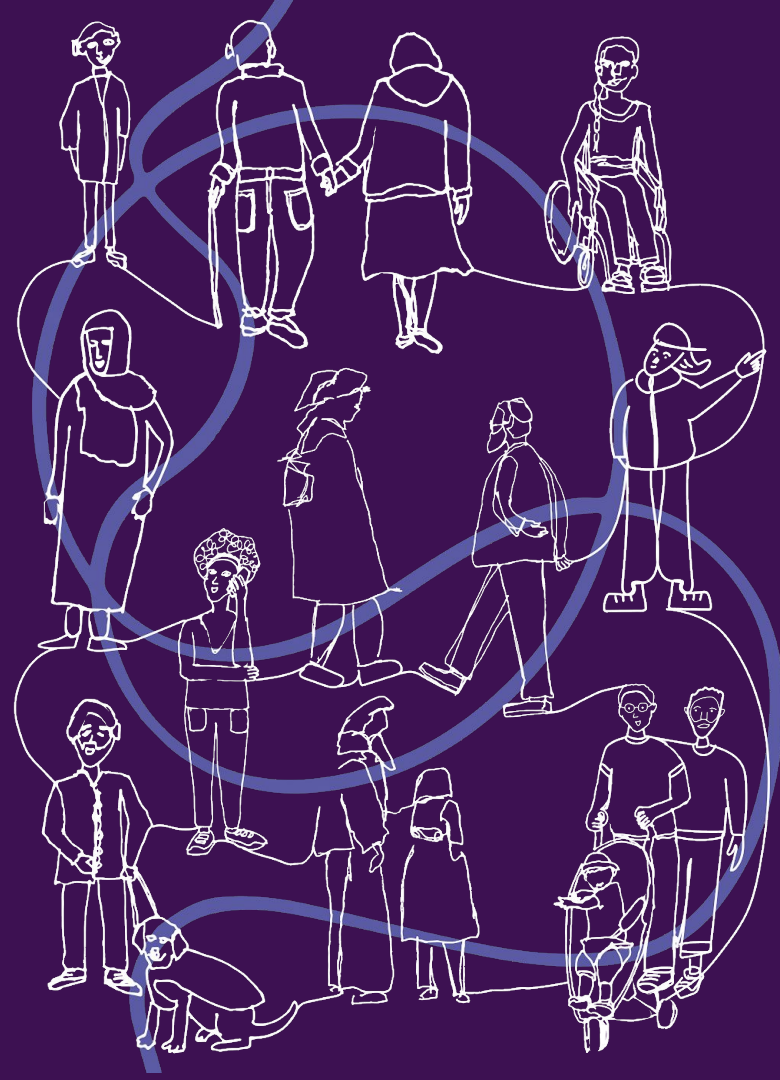
- Relaxed reporting and governance mechanisms
- Showed trust and flexibility
- Facilitated new partnerships

## New ways of funding and delivering support for communities

- Increased speed and ease of access to funding
- Focused funding on shared outcomes rather than outputs

### 3. The role of community organisations in supporting people's health and wellbeing during Covid-19

The following section outlines the crucial and distinct role we heard community organisations played in supporting people's health and wellbeing during Covid-19.



# Community organisations played a distinct and crucial role supporting people's health and wellbeing during Covid-19, by:

Tuning into  
communities'  
changing needs

Rapidly reshaping  
support to meet  
changing needs

Mobilising  
community response



The illustration and themes outlined here are based on the experiences people and community organisations shared during the workshops and events we held between January-March 2021.

# Tuning into communities' changing needs

**Community organisations took an open and responsive approach to listening to people, which helped build trusting and independent relationships locally.**

This helped to strengthen relationships with people who didn't feel trusting of statutory services, and yet often were the people who most needed support or were at risk of being "left behind". Having the ability to build independent, trusting relationships with people locally helped community organisations understand people's changing needs and rapidly respond as gaps emerged.



# Tuning into communities' changing needs

## Building on existing trusting relationships

Community organisations had already forged strong and trusting relationships with people locally before the crisis emerged by taking an open and responsive approach to listening, often in informal ways such as through conversations on people's doorsteps. We heard that this responsive and informal approach helped community organisations form relationships with people who did not feel trusting of statutory services.

Having these independent, trusting connections with local people helped community organisations understand changing needs during Covid-19. They were then able to rapidly respond to what mattered to people that day, e.g. by providing immediate support delivering food and prescriptions, as well as support to maintain people's social connections and wellbeing.

"Often **on the doorstep** people want to chat and offload about problems they are having and how they are feeling."  
*Food bank, Aberdeen*

By providing activity kits staff and people started having honest conversations:  
"**staff picked up those who were in real difficulty**.. 'I only have £2 in my purse'. This built a relationship and **built trust**."  
*Community organisation, Aberdeen*



# Tuning into communities' changing needs

## Helping people to ask for holistic support

Having trusting relationships with people helped community organisations start honest and holistic conversations about what other help they might need, and access this support when they felt ready. For instance, community organisations helped people recognise and get support for mental health needs, traumatic bereavement and to address food insecurity.

## Anticipating the challenges ahead

Community organisations anticipate a need to continue responding to the consequences of Covid-19 and the impact of this on people's health and wellbeing. Many community organisations we spoke with called out a growing need to respond holistically to the long-term consequences of Covid19, from providing mental health support for the collective grief that communities have experienced, to tackling an increasing rise in people experiencing food insecurity.

### Spotlight on..

A community organisation in East Ayrshire offered remote budget cooking class that included the delivery of a food parcel. These were open to a wide range of people to participate, including whole family groups. They found people used the classes to talk about other issues as well, **starting important conversations about what other support might be needed** and referring families on where needed.

# Rapidly reshaping support to meet changing needs

**Through trusting and independent relationships with local people, community organisations were able to rapidly understand and respond to people's changing needs as they emerged, reshaping the support they offered and joining up efforts with other organisations to provide a coherent local response.**

Relaxed regulations and flexible funding helped them adapt their support offers quickly to meet these emerging needs.



# Rapidly reshaping support to meet changing needs

## Rapidly adapting support models

In March 2020, community organisations quickly stepped in to fill gaps they were seeing in local people's unmet needs. We heard community organisations often felt they were "left to pick up the pieces" by statutory services, and that having close relationships with people helped them understand what mattered to people, how needs were changing and to adapt, e.g. providing digital skills and equipment, recruiting volunteers to deliver food and prescriptions and trialling new ways to facilitate meaningful social connections.

## Relaxed regulations and increased flexibility

Community organisations experienced an easing of usual policies, regulations and access to funding, both locally and nationally. They felt this was crucial in enabling them to adapt and respond quickly to people's emerging needs.

"People just wanted to help and we had 500 people sign up to volunteer. Organisations were **quick to respond** because they **didn't have as many restrictions as statutory organisations**. Quick funding access helped as well."

*Third Sector Interface, West of Scotland*

"A lot of red tape we'd have had to go through normally disappeared.. Usually it would take seven weeks to get someone benefits and food sorted, now across [our area] we can do it far more quickly - it's brought us together."

*Third Sector Interface organisation,  
East of Scotland*





# Rapidly reshaping support to meet changing needs

## Using different tools to join-up efforts

In a rapidly changing landscape it was often a challenge to understand what support others were offering. Places adapted differently to build a coherent offer for people. In some areas, statutory organisations led the coordination of local responses, while in other places, community organisations self-organised using digital tools such as online platforms to match people to volunteering opportunities and Slack channels to share information on local support offers.

## Raising concerns about sustainability

Community organisations told us that local and national funding was instrumental in helping them rapidly respond to emerging needs. They also noted that they are now facing uncertainty about longer term funding and that this is now impacting upon their ability to plan how to address the long-term consequences of Covid-19.

### Spotlight on..

A community organisation in Dundee ran a support club for older people at risk of social isolation and undernutrition. As many of them didn't want to be online, they moved to a "Meals on Wheels" model. The Third Sector Interface helped find volunteers to call participants and deliver their meals.

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A food bank in Aberdeen worked with Citizen's Advice to support people's financial stability. An increase in cash donations helped them focus more on strategic planning and to explore partnerships focused on preventing food insecurity.

# Mobilising community response

We heard from community organisations that **the crisis created a sense of unity between community, statutory organisations and businesses, removing some of the usual barriers to collaboration.**

This, alongside community organisations' strong local roots helped to mobilise large numbers of volunteers and establish new and different partnerships to facilitate the sharing of assets and resources.



# Mobilising community response

## Catalysing local people's energy

Lockdown shone a light on existing inequalities such as food poverty and isolation, motivating many to take action. Community organisations were able to attract and channel local people's energy and told us they collectively recruited large numbers of volunteers. Local people also took action in community-led ways, for instance clearing and beautifying local green spaces and checking in on their neighbours.

**"Word of mouth and feet on the streets was so important** as not everyone is digitally connected."

*Community organisation, Glasgow*

"Government needs to be aware that lots of services went on through volunteers, so the **true cost will not be known.**"

*Third Sector Interface, East of Scotland*

"Lots of groups had to adapt very quickly (establishing food drops and community shops) and **the whole experience has fostered a sense of unity**, especially in what was seen as a divided town of haves and have nots."

*Community organisation, Ayrshire*



# Mobilising community response

## Forging new partnerships and sharing resources to support the response

A sense of “we’re all in this together” helped resources flow more freely and organisations to adapt, reimagine their roles and explore how they can share their assets differently through new partnerships. For instance, community transport organisations started taking equipment and vaccinations to care homes, while V&A Dundee worked with charities to reach new audiences virtually and the Thackray Museum became a vaccination hub.

## Lifting barriers to support partnership working

The sense of urgency during the crisis lifted some of the governance barriers that had been in the way of organisations who had been exploring partnerships before Covid-19. During the crisis, new and simpler governance and funding arrangements were put in place quickly to support partnership working.

### Spotlight on..

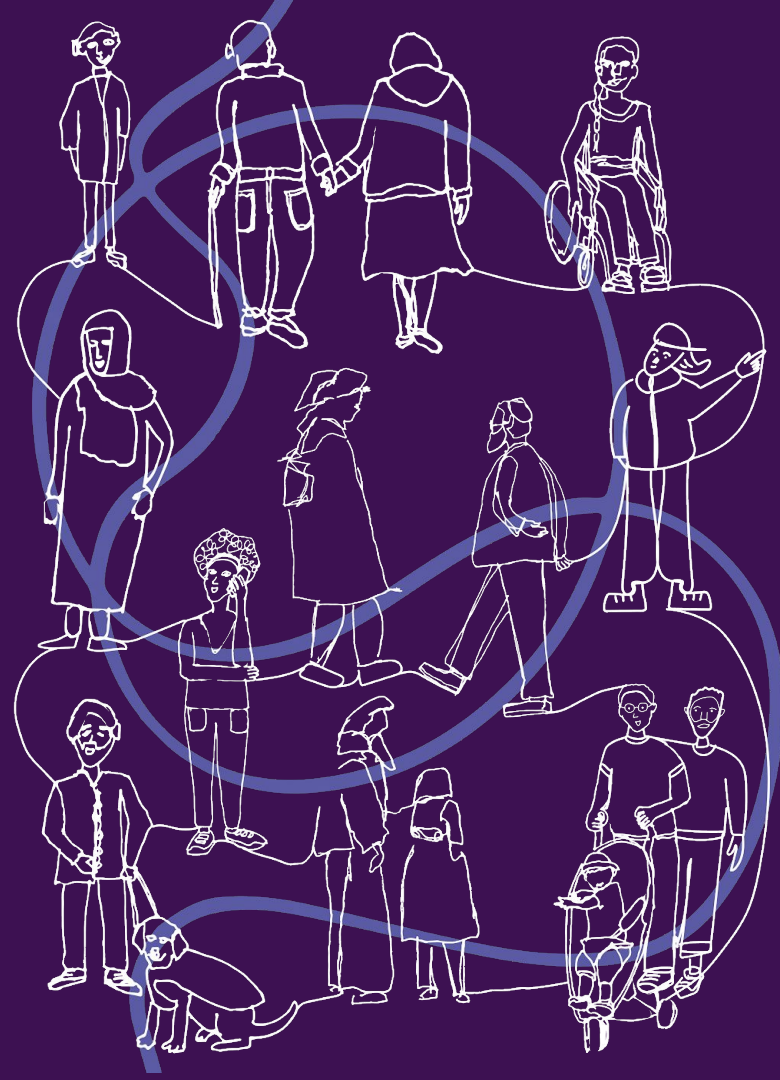
Within 12 hours a community organisation in Edinburgh had 70 volunteers to help deliver school meals across the city. They worked with the Third Sector Interface and restaurants: starting from 600 food packages per week they grew to 5000. They continue having regular meeting as they shift demand onto other partners and explore how they can tackle long-term challenges emerging amongst the most vulnerable groups.

“We came together as a **Resilience Group** facilitated by [the local authority]. External facilitation helped. [Working with] the **care management team enabled us to contact people who weren’t accessing other services.**”

*Faith based organisation, Aberdeen*

## 4. What key factors enabled a positive response to Covid-19?

The following section outlines how statutory organisations and national bodies supported community organisations to provide a positive response to Covid-19.



# Community organisations were supported by statutory organisations and national bodies, who provided:



**Opportunity to  
participate in local  
strategic planning**

**Flexible reporting  
and governance  
mechanisms**

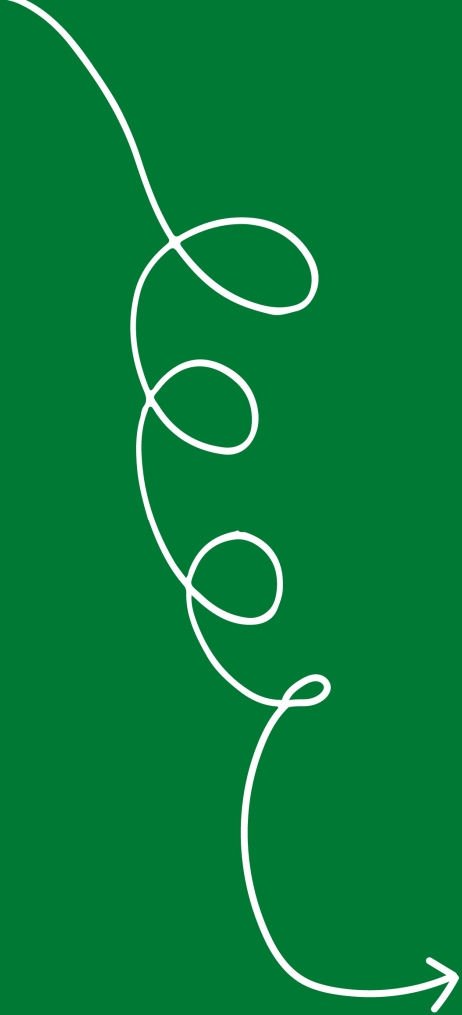
**New ways of funding  
and delivering support  
for communities**

**Underpinned by growing trust between community organisations and statutory services.**

The illustration and themes outlined here are based on the experiences people and community organisations shared during the workshops and events we held between January-March 2021.

# Opportunity to participate in local strategic planning

The pandemic response highlighted the distinct and critical role that community organisations play in supporting local people's health and wellbeing. **Statutory organisations recognised that having strong relationships with communities and creating space for them to participate in local strategic planning aided their response to Covid-19** and helped them connect and work with marginalised people more easily.



# Opportunity to participate in local strategic planning

## Strong relationships between statutory and community organisations aided the response to Covid-19

Local Authorities recognised that investing in developing strong relationships with community organisations, for instance by facilitating new partnerships, helped strengthen statutory responses. This came to the fore during the initial phase of the pandemic, when community organisations played a critical role in making sure people had the food and mental health support they needed. Strong relationships with community organisations helped statutory organisations connect and work with marginalised people they might have struggled to engage on their own. We heard that Resilience Groups, facilitated by some Local Authorities and bringing together community organisations e.g. community councils, faith groups and local schools, effectively made use of community organisations' strengths to reach people.

"People learn to trust us.. we have the skills to build those relationships.

**This should be part of community planning."**

*Community organisation, Aberdeenshire*

"We shared opportunities with local groups as well as things people could do individually - within a few days we had 78 local Resilience Groups. A lot of this was **because of the relationships we already had.**"

*Local Authority, West of Scotland*

**"Seeing [us] as equal partners is so important** – [we] are engaged in this agenda and bring valuable points to the table."

*Community organisation, Glasgow*



# Flexible reporting and governance mechanisms

The crisis lifted usual rules around partnership and reporting arrangements. Working towards a shared set of local outcomes and moving away from traditional transactional and process-oriented practices made it easier for **statutory and community organisations to rapidly develop a shared focus, work together quickly, share resources and collaboratively manage risks.**



# Flexible reporting and governance mechanisms

## Establishing effective governance arrangements

New partnerships formed between statutory and community organisations in response to the crisis. Third Sector Interface organisations and Local Authorities often stepped into leadership roles to facilitate these, quickly drawing up revised partnership agreements so community organisations could collectively bid for funding and work together at pace.

## Shifting approaches to reporting requirements

When Local Authority and Health and Social Care Partnership commissioners adopted a more trusting approach focused on shared local outcomes, it saved community organisations time. Instead of working through burdensome reporting requirements, they were able to focus on responding quickly to local needs. These shifts didn't happen consistently though and community organisations observed that transactional and process-oriented practices and reporting requirements are making a comeback as the system moves into a new phase of recovery.

**"It's amazing what you can do if you give the citizen responsibility and don't wrap it up in tape..** People do want to help and do want to be active, but so many doors are slammed".  
*Community activist, West of Scotland*

**"We found we can put in quick systems with less bureaucracy. What made the work better was by trusting staff and people.. There does need to be governance - but we create it so we can adjust it."**  
*Local Authority, West of Scotland*

# New ways of funding and delivering support for communities

**Rapid access to funding, simplified application processes and streamlined, outcome focused reporting** requirements helped community organisations to rapidly meet people's changing needs.

A shift to **virtual working** helped increase the **reach** and **scope** of community organisations, but engagement with marginalised groups was hindered by **digital exclusion and poverty**.



# New ways of funding and delivering support for communities

## Funders took a trusting and flexible approach

Community organisations accessed public sector funding with more speed and ease during lockdown, mentioning the support of Connecting Scotland, Scotland Resilience Funds and community anchor organisations as vital. Funders showed a greater degree of trust in community organisations to “just get on with it”, placed more focus on outcomes than outputs and showed flexibility in how outcomes could be demonstrated. This enabled community organisations to rapidly adapt their models and respond to changing needs. In our survey 71%\* of community organisations said funding became more flexible and 80% were able to access additional funding during lockdown.

\*N: 28 (27% response rate)

“The application processes didn’t treat communities as commodities and we were able to just get on with it. It was the **first time I’ve felt trusted by a funder.**”

*Community organisation, Edinburgh*

“Food banks are not the answer. We need Scottish Government to **help to address underlying issues.**”

*Faith-based organisation, Aberdeen event*

# New ways of funding and delivering support for communities

## Virtual working helped save resources and foster connections

A forced shift to virtual working helped community organisations reallocate resources they would traditionally have spent on travel and office rent. This was a significant change for community organisations in rural and remote areas, who said the shift helped them become more connected nationally. While community organisations showed ingenuity in adapting to virtual contexts and reaching more people (e.g. overcoming geographical distance, museums engaging new audiences through virtual tours) they noted that equitable access to digital support remains a challenge across both rural and urban communities, and that local and national funders need to acknowledge a continuing need for face-to-face support for some groups, incl. people with learning disabilities and dementia who rely on day centres for social connection.

"We're able to learn far more easily without needing to travel.

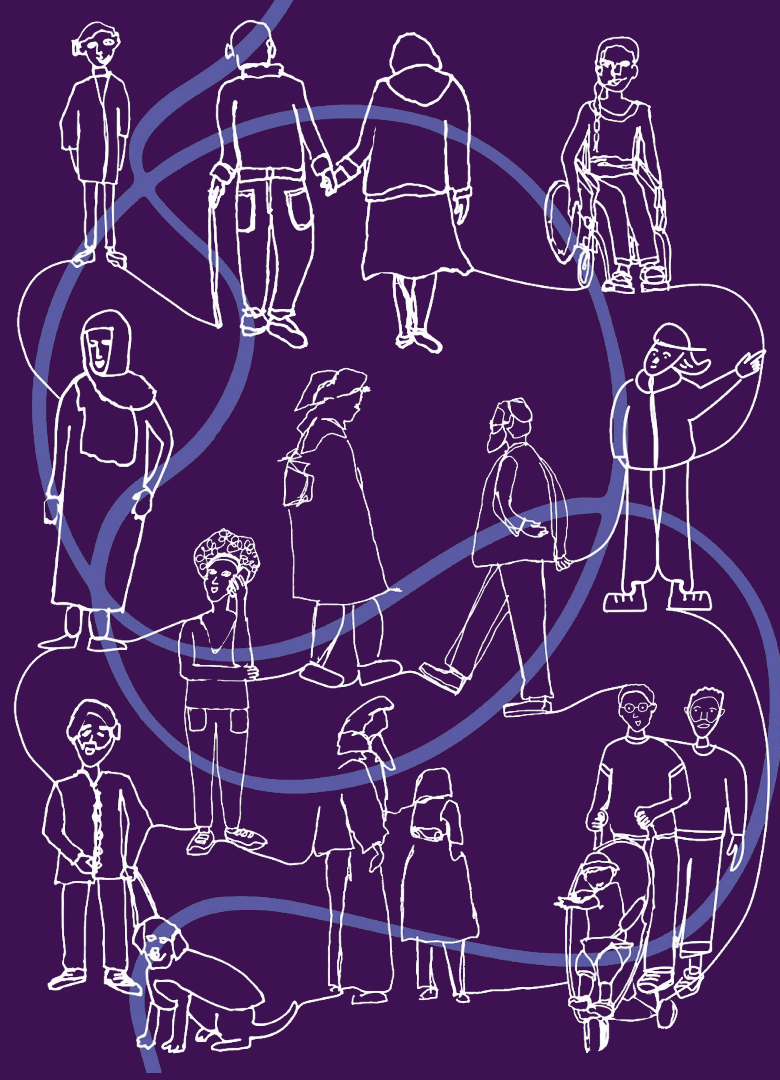
People used to say 'You've come a long way' but they're a long way away from us! **Rural places are having a chance to come into their own.**"

*Community organisation,  
Highlands*

"Looking forward to when we can **pick and choose the good parts of digital** but still have face-to-face when appropriate. Instead of paying £45,000 on rent we can use that money for direct community support.. [to do this] **we need to build digital infrastructure** and access."

*Third Sector Interface, East of Scotland*

## 5. What needs to happen to sustain and scale positive shifts?



# Summary takeaways

Every part of local systems showed flexibility, trust and openness to deliver effective responses to Covid-19.

During Covid-19, **community organisations played a distinct and crucial role**, often **strengthening and filling the gaps** statutory services struggled to by:

- Providing an enhanced understanding of local contexts
- Building on trusting relationships to holistically understand and respond to what mattered to people
- Providing a stronger link between different services and communities
- Being agile in responding to emergent gaps and unmet needs
- Offering an alternative to stretched statutory services
- Forming effective partnerships to share assets and resources
- Mobilising large numbers of volunteers

**They were supported by statutory organisations and national bodies, who:**

- Involved community organisations more in local strategic planning
- Invested in strengthening relationships with community organisations and the mechanisms to sustain these partnerships
- Relaxed reporting and governance mechanisms so community organisations could adapt and work together quickly
- Showed trust and flexibility
- Facilitated new partnerships
- Increased speed and ease of access to funding

**As a result they:**

- Built community resilience to the ongoing impact of Covid-19 and future crises
- Ensured coherence of local support offers
- Ensured people's needs and what mattered to them were quickly recognised and met
- Reached people whose needs may otherwise have not been met
- Strengthened relationships between community and statutory organisations

# What do we need to do next?

The PPR team at Nesta include a series of key recommendations based on what we heard for different stakeholders to implement new ways of working to sustain and scale community organisations' role in supporting people's health and wellbeing in the longer term.

## Space to participate in local strategic planning

### Community organisations

**Participate in local collaborative infrastructures** with statutory organisations.  
**Share expertise** as part of local strategic planning.

### Statutory organisations

**Develop and participate in local collaborative infrastructures** to facilitate partnership working.  
**Continuously integrate community organisations' expertise** into local strategic plans.

### Scottish Government

- Learn from change efforts within local systems to:**
- **Inform national and local policies** that help organisations form new partnerships, share resources and manage risks together;
  - **Invest in sustainable, longer term funding** to address the long-term consequences of Covid-19;
  - **Continue to invest in equitable access** to digital infrastructure.

## Flexible reporting and governance mechanisms

**Maintain a focus on local outcomes** in service delivery and reporting, making the most of flexibility to adapt to changing needs.  
**Explore new effective partnerships** to share assets and resources.

**Focus on shared local outcomes rather than outputs** in local commissioning to underpin service delivery and reporting requirements.  
**Produce simple partnership agreements** so community organisations can reimagine roles, bid for funding and work together quickly.

## New ways of funding and delivering support

**Share information** about support available and volunteering opportunities through local communication channels.  
**Test and try out** new ways of **demonstrating outcomes and impact.**

**Establish quick, simple funding processes**  
**Test new communication channels** to facilitate joint-working.  
Find ways of continuing to **share, information, assets and resources** to best meet local needs.



# Help us shape these actionable recommendations

Join the conversation and help shape these actionable recommendations by signing up to the launch event in May.

Have a question or an idea? Reach out to:

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