



VCS Emergencies  
Partnership



# Lasting Connections

Emergencies Partnership Covid-19 Impact Report  
2020-2021

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**Baroness Barran**  
*Minister for Civil Society*

“During one of the most sustained and wide-reaching crises of our time, the Emergencies Partnership’s work to build bridges both within the voluntary and community sector, and with external partners, has been invaluable.”

“Building this collaboration during this challenge has not been easy. However, the Emergencies Partnership has been tested, and has evolved with the changing needs to become a trusted mechanism for helping communities in times of need.”

## Foreword

from co-chairs, **Mike Adamson** and **Maddy Desforges**

We have all experienced the past year differently, and while few would want to live through this again, there is much to reflect on, learn from, and build on. We particularly want to thank the volunteers and the voluntary and community organisations who have stepped up time and again, to offer support where it has been needed most. We thank the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport for funding the Emergencies Partnership to help us build better connections and facilitate us all to play our role in supporting communities.

As a partnership, we believe that a more joined up voluntary and community sector, with local and national organisations better connected to work collaboratively will provide a more effective, locally relevant, and focused emergency response. We have connected local and national partners, harnessed collective skills and insight, created solutions and learned a lot, together. This partnership has enabled organisations to build bridges and develop reliable routes to engage with each other and government locally and nationally.

Now is the time to use what we’ve been through during the Covid-19 crisis to ensure that we are in the best possible position to keep people at the heart of our focus when the next shock hits, and that we have the relationships and connections to call on when they are needed. Understanding more about the risks and resilience of communities, knowing the right people to connect to, and continuing to build trust and insight are all key as the economic and social impacts of Covid-19 continue. They are challenges we will overcome if we do it together.



**Mike Adamson**  
*Chief Executive, British Red Cross*



**Maddy Desforges**  
*Chief Executive, NAVCA*



## The journey so far...

The Emergencies Partnership was created in 2018, following the experience of the Grenfell Tower fire, 2017 terror attacks, and rural flooding across the country. Our purpose is to build greater national resilience and a better experience for people impacted by emergencies, by making best use of resources across the voluntary and community sector.

In March last year we were faced with an unprecedented crisis. Since then, we have built, adapted and evolved our partnership in line with the crisis. We created regional and national hubs to improve coordination between our partners. We learned it is as important to understand what is happening, as much as what isn't. We grew local, regional and national networks to exchange ideas and insights. We adapted to make best use of skills, resources and assets across the sector. We learned, and must continue to learn, how to involve and better represent at-risk and disproportionately impacted or underrepresented communities.

Whilst we still have a long way to go in achieving our objectives, this report charts how we responded under pressure to the Covid-19 crisis, covering what we have achieved and what is coming next. It explores what we have learnt over the last year and our reflections on what we believe the sector and government need to preserve and develop in order to deliver systemic change across the sector.

“This journey started in 2018 with introspective reflections on the learnings from what we as the voluntary and community sector could do better in times of emergencies for those most disproportionately impacted. A more coordinated and collaborative approach was desperately needed. In 2020/21, working together in partnership for a common purpose of reaching the most impacted, has been a challenging endeavour but a hugely rewarding and humbling experience at the same time. Heartfelt thanks to all who have been involved in enabling the vision of the Emergencies Partnership in becoming a reality.”

*Jehangir Malik, Programme Director, Emergencies Partnership*



Photo © Amara Eno/BRC

# The Covid-19 crisis in numbers

## The impact

**16%**

of children missed meals due to hardship during the pandemic.<sup>1</sup>

Nearly

**4 million**

people were classed as extremely clinically vulnerable.<sup>2</sup>

**1 in 5**

UK adults volunteered during the first lockdown.<sup>3</sup>

In the first lockdown, charities reported a

**48% drop**

in voluntary income.<sup>4</sup>

## Our network has grown

from **12-15**

organisations in March 2020, to over

**200 local**

partners and

**30 national**

partners in March 2021 to build and foster connections and collaborate.

## We have produced and distributed

**23 new reports**

which collected and shared insights on trends and emerging issues, directly informing emergency operations.

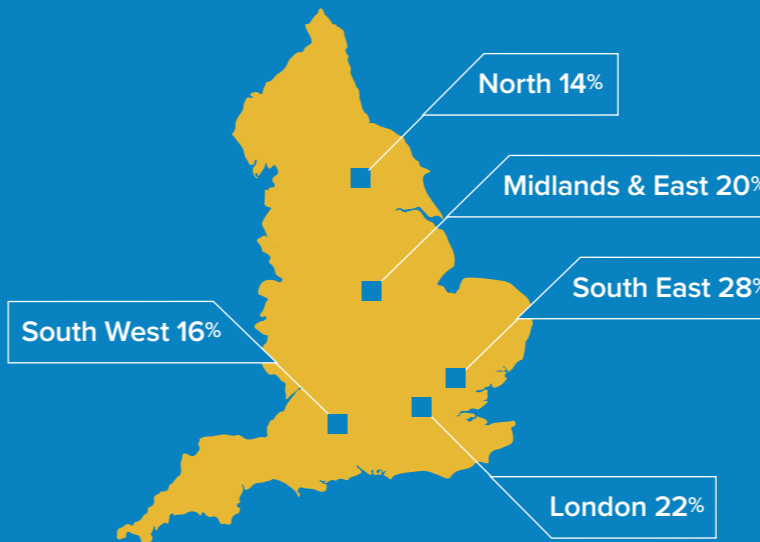
## We have worked together to identify and respond to

over **220** requests for support.\*



\* Requests can be for more than one category

## These areas have requested our support:



**176** organisations have been supported so far and have embedded relationships with **65%** of the 38 Local Resilience Forums.

## The National Volunteering Coordination Cell has deployed a significant number of volunteers to help with large-scale requests:

**21** requests received

**13** requests advised on

**8** requests volunteers deployed on

**3,153** volunteers deployed

**250,032** volunteer hours

<sup>1</sup> Social Market Foundation / Opinium survey, 2020

<sup>2</sup> Government figures, February 2021

<sup>3</sup> Isolation Economic study, Legal & General, 2020

<sup>4</sup> [www.civilsociety.co.uk/news/charities-expect-voluntary-income-to-halve-because-of-coronavirus-survey-finds.html](http://www.civilsociety.co.uk/news/charities-expect-voluntary-income-to-halve-because-of-coronavirus-survey-finds.html), March 2020

# Our Covid-19 response

The pandemic presented an entirely new challenge for several reasons – its scale, the speed of its onset, and the adoption of unprecedented restrictions on movement at short notice. There were urgent needs and there were also huge numbers of people who wanted to help. Our goal was to enable the voluntary sector to connect the two.

Here, we show the immediate actions we took and where that activity is now.

## Requesting help

### March 2020

Launched our Request for Support online tool to enable organisations to request help from across our partnership

### March 2021

Weekly opportunity to access new requests for support and organise cross-sector response, including creating space to sharing emerging insights, learnings and pinch points



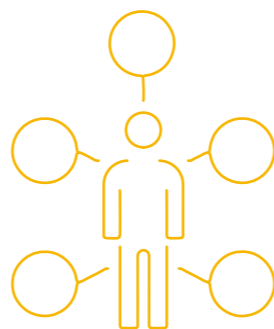
## Building regional cells

### March 2020

Set up five multi-agency cells across England; bringing together local, regional and national organisations to share intelligence, support and resources.

### March 2021

Built trusted regional relationships and supported 176 organisations so far



## Connecting volunteers

### March 2020

Launched the National Volunteering Coordination Cell (NVCC) to respond to large scale requests for volunteers

### March 2021

Activated over 3,000 volunteers so far and helped coordinate links between schools and local charities to support the provision of testing when students returned in early March 2021



## Bringing the state and sector together

### March 2020

Weekly national network opportunities sharing insights and real time response information

### March 2021

Providing a range of opportunities for voluntary and community sector leaders, government partners, and advisors to come together to share insights and real time information on response activity:

- National Network
- Regional multi-agency cells
- Local Intelligence Network
- Weekly NVCC opportunities
- Ad hoc workshops and working groups



## Improving knowledge

### March 2020

Launched our first online insights tool, a web map, with thanks to the British Red Cross, that layers areas of heightened vulnerability with support services, and enables targeted operational outreach.

### March 2021

We now have seven products live:

- Web map
- Fortnightly pulse reports showing emerging needs at a local level
- Pulse Check dashboard
- Risk Indicator Portal
- Request for Support service
- Request for Support dashboard
- Vaccine Rollout dashboard

Cells create space to regularly share insight and learnings





## Understanding emerging needs

Through digital platforms, national insight reports, and new partnerships, we can see the positive impact of sharing insight and knowledge can have across the sector.

### Building new networks

- The Local Infrastructure Network (LIN) is developed, coordinated and managed by NAVCA (National Association for Voluntary and Community Action) and includes NAVCA, NCVO and ACRE members. The LIN unites the Emergencies Partnership’s local partners to share intelligence, insights, and good practice about the Covid-19 response.
- Our partners are forming their own organic partnerships for specific purposes at a local and national level, prompted by our work. For example, in London, the Muslim Charities Forum and the London Community Foundation joined forces for a three month strategic partnership to run virtual events, combined funding applications, and ran roundtables and consultations, to ensure grant making reflects the needs of all London’s communities. Nationally, St John Ambulance, the Royal Voluntary Service, and the British Red Cross are collaborating on dividing labour during the vaccination programme.
- We are building a growing network with the government, working collaboratively with multiple departments to shape voluntary and community sector support and engagement. This includes working with the Prison and Probation Service, the Department for Transport and the Department for Education.

“The Emergencies Partnership has offered us a platform to air challenges between local and national and helped build links with the local Rotary Club. We now have a call every two weeks to check in on activity and ensure there is no duplication in efforts.”

*Vikki Wilkinson, Chief Executive, Bexley Voluntary Service Council*

Following a request received by the National Volunteering Coordination Cell from Her Majesty’s Prison and Probation Service, Volunteering Matters and a range of local partners are working together to support people on probation who are at risk of loneliness and isolation by providing a befriending service.

Launched in January 2021, 270 volunteers have been recruited, there have been over 240 referrals to date, and over 600 phone calls have taken place so far.

“Brilliant! I look forward to a Wednesday and watch the clock for 4pm because I know that you are going to call.”

*Person supported by the programme*

## Making insight easy to share and act on

We created new tools to help voluntary and community sector groups identify, understand, and map the issues and develop appropriate responses.

- Working with the British Red Cross, we shared an online map that layers areas of heightened vulnerability over support services, and enables targeted operational outreach.
- In May 2020 we launched an online service to enable organisations to request help from our partners.
- Our regular Pulse Check survey gathers local insight from our network of local partners and improves understanding of unmet needs at both local and national level.
- As part of our insights-gathering process we have published and promoted nine national insight reports ranging in focus from vaccine hesitancy to food insecurity. Partners are using these reports to share their perspectives with other organisations, and develop their thinking through shared analysis and problem solving.

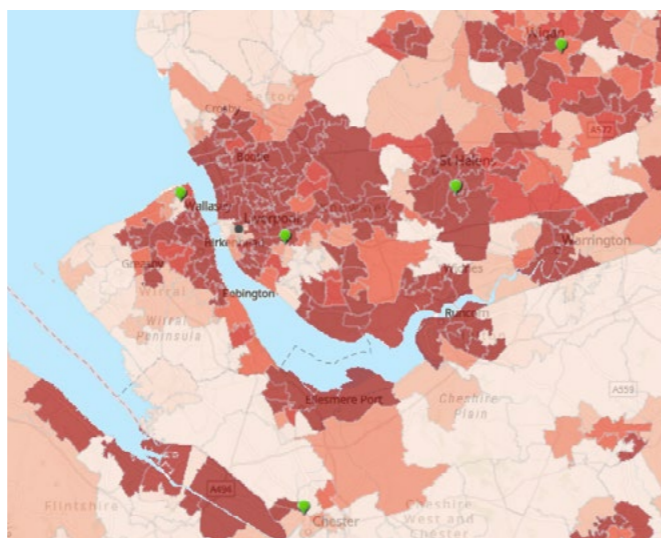
We continue to develop our insight tools and ability to ensure insight underpins our partners' work.

"The real benefit of building a national picture as gives vital context to the severity or systemic nature of the problem."

"It enables us to plan for the future and scope gaps and opportunities."

"It allows us to benchmark against other parts of the region."

*Quotes from the Local Infrastructure Network midpoint survey*



Snapshot of the webmap, showing areas of socioeconomic vulnerability in the Merseyside area

## Responding in partnership

Responding to the insights shared on emerging needs, our partners have worked together to tackle the urgent issues, such as food insecurity and mental health. Here are just a few examples of the partnership in action.

### Food insecurity

Food poverty was a severe issue prior to the pandemic and it has increased dramatically over the last year.

**One million 8-17 year-olds (13%) and their families visited a food bank over Christmas 2020 and January 2021<sup>5</sup>.**

We supported FareShare and the British Red Cross to link over 30 local and national organisations including those campaigning on related areas such as retaining the £20 Universal Credit uplift and free school meals. The group has combined its insights, mapping the work of individual campaigns and bringing together the collective knowledge and expertise of the group, to show the changes that need to happen to reduce hunger and hardship in the UK. The group will be recommending to government, the sector, businesses, and the public clear actions on how everyone can play their part.

"Hunger and hardship are harmful – and in a society of plenty, both are injustices that nobody should be left to live with, either during or in the legacy of a major crisis. The Emergencies Partnership has enabled us to bring together not-for-profit organisations, academics and government stakeholders who specialise in poverty, food insecurity and distribution, to understand and co-create collaboratively a *Blueprint to Solve Poverty. End hunger. Strengthen communities.*

Emergency food aid and other crisis provision should only be a temporary measure in an emergency and the Blueprint and its recommendations champion how we can work together and use the learning from the pandemic to contribute to solving some of the biggest societal issues."

*Kris Gibbon-Walsh, UK Director of Network and Operations, FareShare, and Matthew Killick, UK Director Crisis Response & Community Resilience, British Red Cross – joint chairs of the Emergencies Partnership food working group*

<sup>5</sup> Food Foundation 2021



## Mental health and social support

Mind’s survey on Covid-19 and mental health, published in October 2020, found that over half of adults (60%) and over two thirds of young people (68%) said their mental health worsened during the first lockdown.

Stimulated by shared findings, insights from our partners, and the reduction or in many cases stoppage of face-to-face services, Mind and the British Red Cross convened a working group of organisations ranging from the Trussell Trust to Faith Action. Together, their aim is to identify gaps in provision, challenge mental health discrimination, and improve the depth of our response for people with mental health needs.

“The mental health impacts of Covid-19 have been huge and it is vitally important we come together as a sector to share the best ways to support those affected and to challenge the stigma and discrimination that people with mental health needs experience. We want to ensure people feel supported when they raise mental health concerns and ultimately the right services and advice are in place whenever needed.”

*Dr Sarah Davidson, Head of Psychosocial and Mental Health, British Red Cross, and Gavin Atkins, Head of Communities, Mind – joint chairs of the Emergencies Partnership mental health working group*

### Telephone befriending in Bradford

A telephone befriending scheme was set up in Bradford to support people with particular needs, including victims of domestic violence. Local attempts to recruit volunteers generated just one person, so Community Action Bradford and District (CAB&D) turned to the Emergencies Partnership for help, requesting support with sourcing volunteers. We organised partners to recruit volunteers, with Rotary in Yorkshire playing a big part, whilst Business in the Community supported by engaging with large companies.

“I got in touch with the Emergencies Partnership multi-agency cell that covers my area and they swiftly helped with my ask for more volunteers. We now have over 80 volunteers and counting and now the service can also support those who are feeling lonely and isolated.”

*Soo Nevison, CEO of Community Action Bradford and District (CAB&D)*

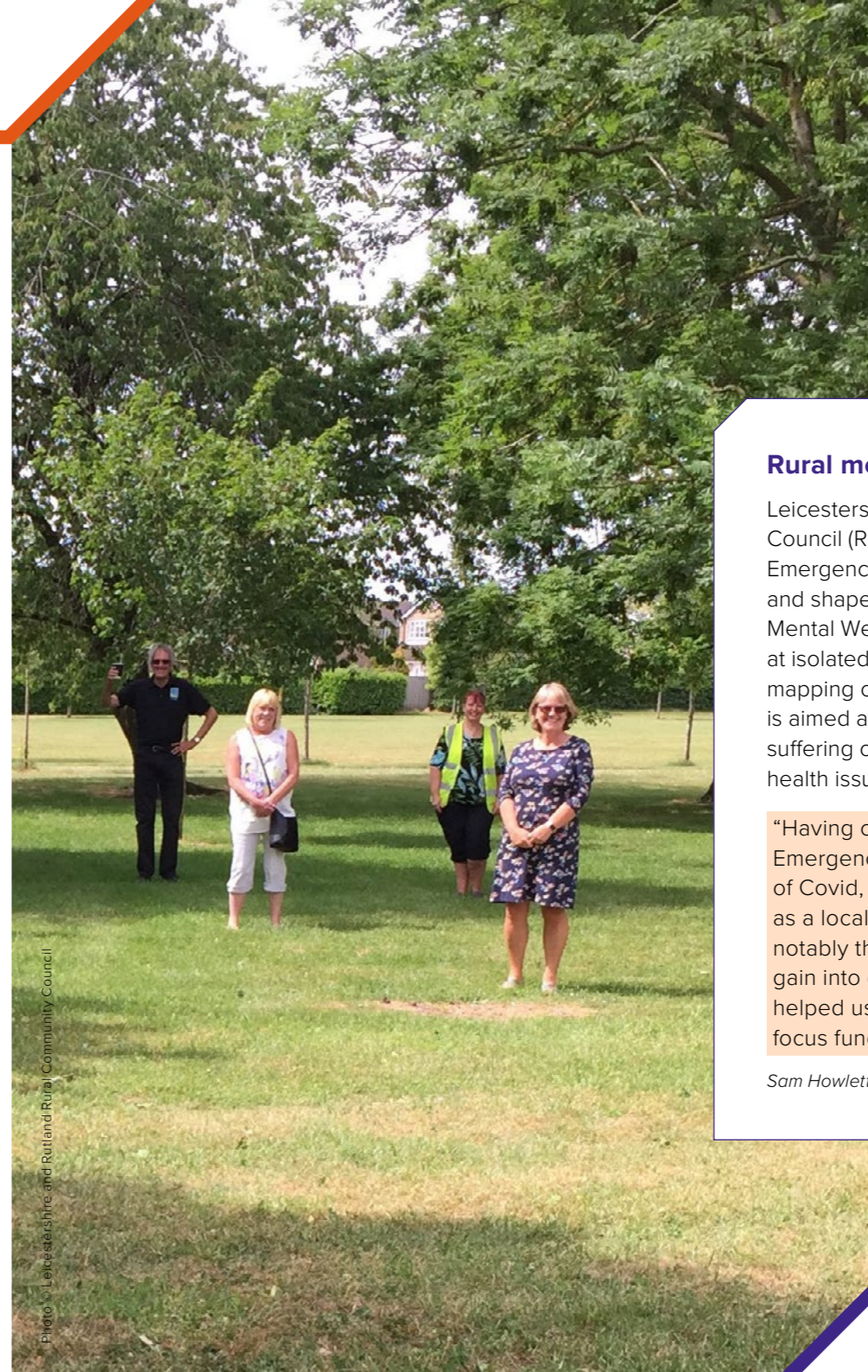


Photo © Leicestershire and Rutland Rural Community Council

### Rural mental health

Leicestershire and Rutland’s Rural Community Council (RCC) used insight shared through the Emergencies Partnership to help evidence and shape a County Council funding bid for Mental Wellbeing Awareness Training aimed at isolated rural communities. This included mapping of community-based provision and is aimed at connecting and supporting those suffering ongoing, exacerbated or new mental health issues as a result of the pandemic.

“Having only been involved in the Emergencies Partnership since the onset of Covid, we have found it hugely beneficial as a local infrastructure organisation, most notably the insight we have been able to gain into gaps in provision. This has hugely helped us to target our resources and focus funding bids.”

*Sam Howlett, Executive Director, RCC*



## Connecting with at risk communities

During the pandemic we have all been in the same storm, but not all in the same ship. The pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on people and communities who were already at risk.<sup>6</sup>

Almost 6 million people are now receiving Universal Credit, up from 2.7 million in January 2020.\* Black and minority ethnic people are consistently more likely than white people to have experienced negative financial impacts due to the coronavirus crisis and lockdown.\*\*

\* *Employment in the UK: February 2021, Office of National Statistics, 2021*

\*\* *Over-Exposed and Under-Protected, Runnymede Trust and ICM, June 2020*

We must do more to ensure those worst hit by major emergencies get the support they need. We have started our work in this space, and are passionately committed to our Equality Principles<sup>7</sup>, to identify people and groups who are, or are likely to be, disproportionately impacted and analysing those impacts to provide insights and recommendations for change. We will also continue to increase the diversity of voices within the partnership. We want people with diverse perspectives and from diverse backgrounds at every level and function of our network.



Photo © Kate Stenworth/BRC

### We have:

- Shared feedback, insights and learnings from grassroots organisations on their work with marginalised and at-risk communities with decision-makers.
- Supported NCVO who brought together advice from over 70 voluntary and community organisations, Clinical Commissioning Groups and local public health leads on how the government can work closely with the voluntary and community sector to identify gaps in vaccination take up in terms of geography, and specific groups and communities.
- Identified partners with expertise in understanding and responding to the specific needs of communities and began developing relationships, including with Khalsa Aid and Ubele Initiative's contribution to the mental health working group.
- Submitted evidence alongside the Voluntary Sector Infrastructure Group to the Cabinet Office Covid-19 Taskforce on effectively engaging marginalised communities with the vaccination programme. This contributed to the amnesty for people with insecure immigration status to be vaccinated; the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport producing a communications pack and other support for equality sector groups to use with their communities; and the Community Champions scheme being more inclusive

of marginalised groups such as Gypsy Roma and Traveller communities.

- Worked with the Faith Unit in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to diversify our work with faith-based communities.

"Our faith groups and communities have risen to the challenges this pandemic has presented us with, offering solace to so many people, not just for their spiritual wellbeing, but also by offering a multitude of voluntary services. Over the past year, I have witnessed first-hand the ability that faith groups possess to mobilise resources at pace to support communities during emergencies."

*Lord Greenhalgh, Minister of State (Minister for Building Safety and Communities)*

<sup>6</sup> Runnymede Trust, summary of survey results for Over-Exposed and Under-Represented, 2020  
<sup>7</sup> vcsep.org.uk/equality-principles

## A more diverse and inclusive future

At the beginning of 2021, we embarked on a research project to better understand how marginalised and more at-risk communities experience emergencies and what they need from a partnership such as ours.<sup>8</sup>

Participants included 23 stakeholders involved with the Emergencies Partnership and 13 specialist organisations working locally in Bradford and Leeds led by and for marginalised communities, including refugees and asylum seekers, disabled and homeless communities. The project included a series of interviews, co-creation workshops and concept testing sessions.

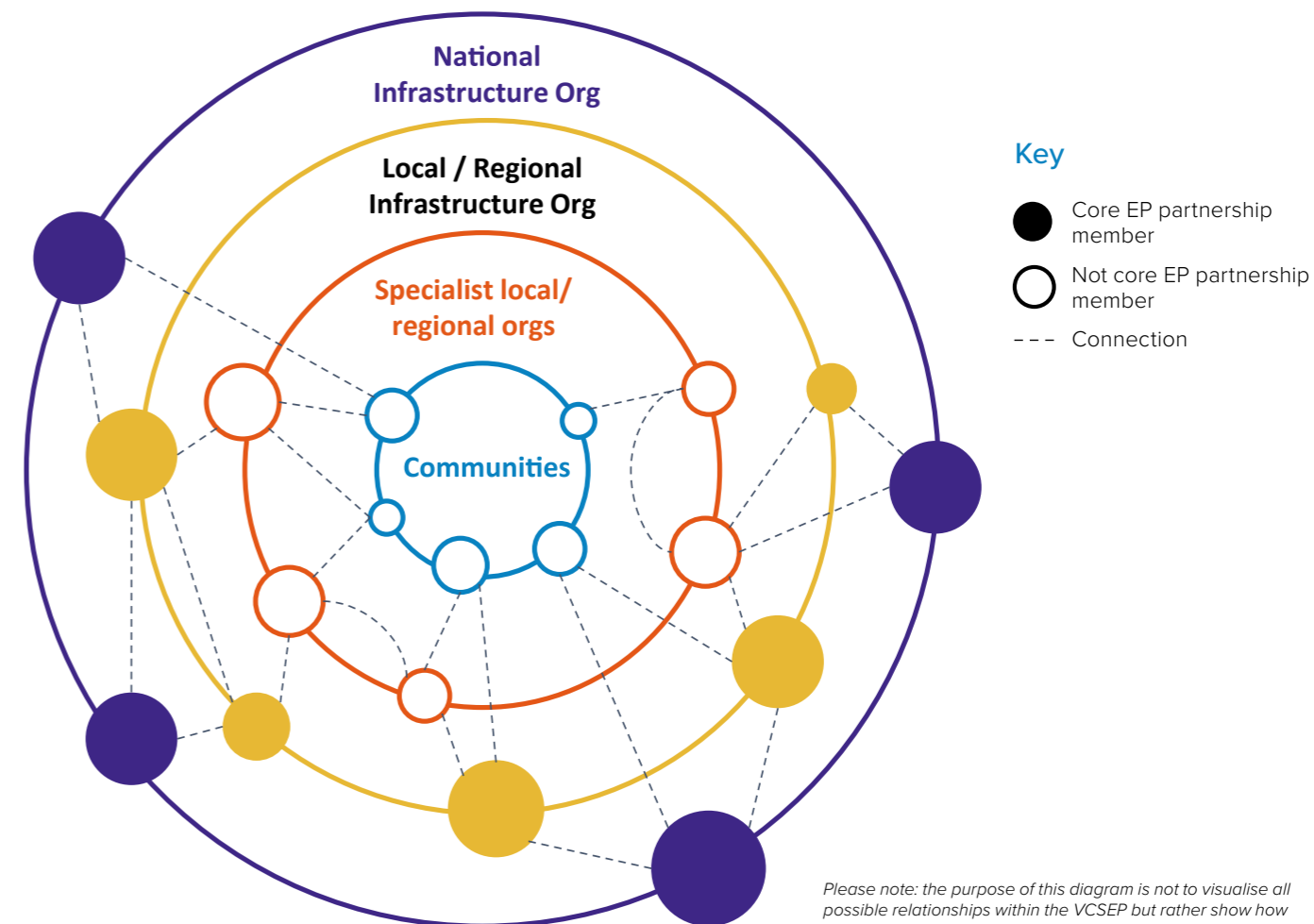
The research highlighted the importance of specialist organisations who can be the main point of contact for many in more marginalised communities due to establishing trusted relationships and wide reach. Also the need for the Emergencies Partnership to adopt a connection model with ‘preparedness’ as its main focus. This should support local networking and coordination as much as possible, and ensure key connectors are supported.

We are working through the recommendations to plan how we can take this forward and take a test and learn approach to implementation.

“Our organisation hasn’t really been brought together before with other organisations that support diverse or BAME communities and the statistics are saying these have been hardest hit. Initiatives from above would help to bring us out of our isolation in the way we bring individuals out of isolation. This process has felt a bit like a counselling session for me, because I think we’ve been so busy we’ve been cut off from other organisations and the bigger picture.”

*One of the organisations involved in the project*

## Connection Model – recommended as a result of the findings



<sup>8</sup> Research was conducted by Stripe Partners, a human research consultancy, and Ashley Evans, a freelance service designer.



# Testing and vaccinating the nation

In recent months, we have shifted toward supporting mass testing and the vaccination programme for Covid-19.

- We received 17 requests to manage testing centres.
- We were involved in the first UK mass testing site in Liverpool. A request for support came via local partner Sefton VCS and quickly became a collaborative approach involving our partners British Red Cross, RE:ACT, and Muslim Charities Forum. The insight gained helped to shape the future modelling of test centres and the roles that the voluntary and community sector has played within them.
- Working with the Department for Education, our partners supported 55 schools with Covid-19 testing, with 622 volunteers mobilised. Our National Volunteering Coordination Cell created a toolkit for sector organisations to help schools and colleges reopen more safely.

“The support we have received from the RE:ACT volunteer team has been incredible. The dedication and commitment from their team of volunteers has enabled Baytree School to plan and successfully implement a Covid-19 testing site which is helping to ensure the safety of the school community.”

*Ed Bowen-Roberts, Headmaster of Baytree School, Weston-super-Mare*

Our local and national partners supported schools all over the country completing tasks like the one at Baytree Specialist School in Weston-super-Mare and Devonport High School for Boys in Plymouth to test teachers for Covid-19. A team of 4 RE:ACT volunteers carried out 455 lateral flow tests over a period of 4 weeks



Photo © RE:ACT Disaster Response

In December 2020 Medway Council requested support from the Emergencies Partnership to help launch five Covid-19 testing centres.

Our system and set of relationships enabled us to mobilise at pace and scale. Medway’s voluntary and community organisations have been working closely since the first lockdown and our partner, Medway Voluntary Action, has a well-established and close working relationship with relevant council departments. National organisations RE:ACT and Rotary Great Britain & Ireland also supported by providing volunteers.

Medway tested 32,000 people within two weeks before December ended. Volunteers brokered through our network were essential in aiding the council and Armed Forces to launch and develop the testing programme.

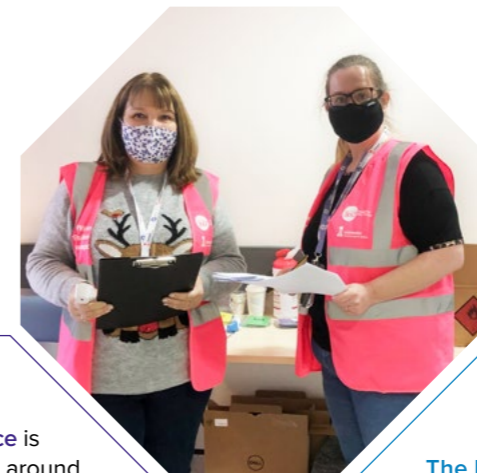
### Covid-19 vaccination programme

At the end of December 2020, our partners embarked on the challenge of supporting the biggest vaccination programme in UK history. By providing volunteers at vaccination centres, supporting marginalised groups to understand, engage with and access the vaccine, or physically getting people to a place they can get the vaccine safely, our partners filled essential gaps in the vaccine rollout.

“We’re really proud to be part of the Emergencies Partnership. We are all about making connections and making a difference. Our involvement in the partnership has allowed us to do just that when it comes to supporting the rollout of Covid-19 vaccinations, and will help us to continue to serve our communities effectively in the future.”

Amanda Watkin, General Secretary, Rotary in Great Britain and Ireland

Here are some of the activities currently taking place:



**Local voluntary groups** are recruiting volunteers to help steward people arriving to have their vaccine, helping provide reassurance and a listening ear. **Partners** are working with local communities to tackle vaccine hesitancy by myth busting and engaging local communities in understanding and accessing accurate information.

**St John Ambulance** is recruiting and training around 30,000 volunteers to support the NHS Covid-19 vaccination programme in three frontline clinical roles; vaccinator, patient advocate and care volunteer. Volunteers have already given more than 75,000 hours of their time, working in more than 100 sites across the country.

**The Royal Voluntary Service** is recruiting steward volunteers via the NHS Volunteer Responders programme to support vaccination sites and increase capacity in areas where support was needed. To date, volunteers have committed over 145,000 hours.

**Barnsley CVS** is hosting the main vaccination centre, in a standard week booking over 3,000 vaccination appointments.

**The British Red Cross** has organised over 2,200 volunteer deployments as well as reaching vulnerable communities to ensure people have access to accurate information about the vaccine. Their community outreach programme includes supporting people outside the healthcare system to register with GPs and providing accessible vaccine information in a range of languages.

**The Salvation Army** is offering churches and community centres across the country for use as vaccination hubs. Church leaders are also providing pastoral support to NHS staff, volunteers, and the public.

**RE:ACT** assisted with opening Bristol’s first mass vaccination site, and 10 other sites across the country. To date, over 405 RE:ACT volunteers have assisted with marshalling, planning, and volunteer coordination.

**Rotary Great Britain & Ireland** is providing hundreds of their members to volunteer at vaccination centres nationwide. Rotary volunteers have been greeting, guiding and supporting patients at centres which are often administering over 1,000 jabs per day.

Photos left to right: © Daniel Lewis/St John Ambulance, © Community360, © Kate Stanworth/BRC



### The strong relationships developed through the Emergencies Partnership routinely enabled effective action.

- We have worked to improve understanding of who is doing what with our national partners who have been heavily involved in the response. Increasing connections between national campaigns such as being run by the Royal Voluntary Service and local initiatives with CVS has been key.
- We are also using tech to solve the challenge, including working with Time to Spare in London, which is piloting an initiative to pull together all vaccination support requests the sector in London are receiving. Our Liaison Lead brought their excellent work on mapping local groups and charities to the attention of the multi-agency cell in London and we connected Time to Spare to the national picture, developing a more rounded resource.
- Our Insights Platform team has developed a Covid-19 vaccination insights dashboard to show vaccine uptake across a number of demographics in order to inform response, outreach, and advocacy.
- We are sharing action to address vaccine hesitancy, providing a platform for our partners to share insights and campaign activity to encourage the collective voice to support.
- Partners have been working with statutory bodies to improve access to the vaccine, including Muslim Charities Forum who have been facilitating the conversion of mosques into vaccination centres.

When **Bexley Voluntary Service Council (BVSC)** was asked to help supply vaccination support volunteers, it began a shift in how volunteers and the voluntary sector were seen by system partners. Working closely with the local primary care trust, public health team, GPs, other voluntary sector organisations and the Clinical Commissioning Group, the volunteering effort enabled individuals to be invested in their community and be part of tackling the pandemic. It helped free up healthcare staff and has raised awareness in the borough of the voluntary sector's capabilities.

Responding quickly to a huge ask developed the already strong relationship that BVSC had with their local authority and health care partners:

**“We have always had a good relationship with the borough, but the pandemic provided an opportunity to encourage local organisations to think creatively about volunteering roles. We’ve been talking about how to diversify the model for volunteering, exploring options like micro-volunteering.”**

*Kate Shrager, Volunteer Centre Manager, from BVSC*

145 volunteers are actively helping with the vaccine effort, of which 80% are first time volunteers.

In **Barnsley**, the local community and voluntary sector umbrella organisation, Barnsley CVS, is hosting the main vaccination centre, supporting the other vaccination centres with all volunteers, and manning the main vaccination booking call centre for the area. In a standard week the call centre makes over 5,000 calls and books over 3,000 vaccination appointments.



“Here at Barnsley CVS we understand how much the Covid-19 pandemic has hit third sector organisations and families alike, and are committed to doing everything we can to enable us to get back to a new normal, whatever that looks like.

Supporting the vaccination rollout programme across the borough, is one way we can help. It’s been a massive effort where our staff and volunteers have worked so hard and have been truly amazing.

I’ve been so proud of what we’ve been able to achieve and the numbers of people we’ve been able to help, however this is only possible due to our amazing volunteers, dedicated volunteer team, and with partnership working with the Barnsley Healthcare Federation.

Having good local connections, a dedicated volunteer base and strong meaningful partnerships as well as good humour and hard work, proves you can do almost anything.”

*John Marshall, Chief Executive, Barnsley CVS*

# Beyond Covid-19

In addition to the pandemic, we have experienced a range of emergencies over the past year. The pandemic has added complications which have challenged us in our response, but the sector has continued to be there for those who need us.

## Storm Cristoph

Hundreds of homes were flooded across the country in January 2021 and many of our partners responded, from organising volunteers to help people being evacuated from their homes, to supporting efforts to redirect people after a vaccination centre car park was flooded.

“Having consistent representation from a single agency on the Local Resilience Forums (LRF) allowed for good information gathering at pace across a wide scale area. This also helped with clarifying tasks that could affect different Local Authorities within a particular LRF footprint.”

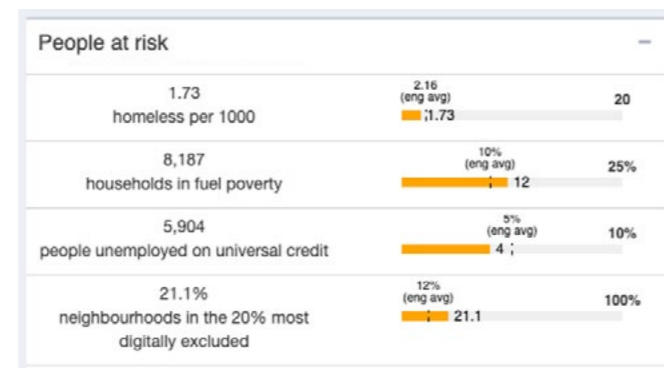
*Paul Etches, Regional Lead, North multi-agency cell, Emergencies Partnership*

For the first time, we tested our insights platform in a live situation, launching our Risk Indicator Portal that uses flooding data from the Environment Agency to provide our teams with live information and planning assistance. The dashboard combined flood warning updates with historic flood incident data and information on the number of people living in flood risk areas, alongside partner insights on overall vulnerability, resilience, and demographic indicators.

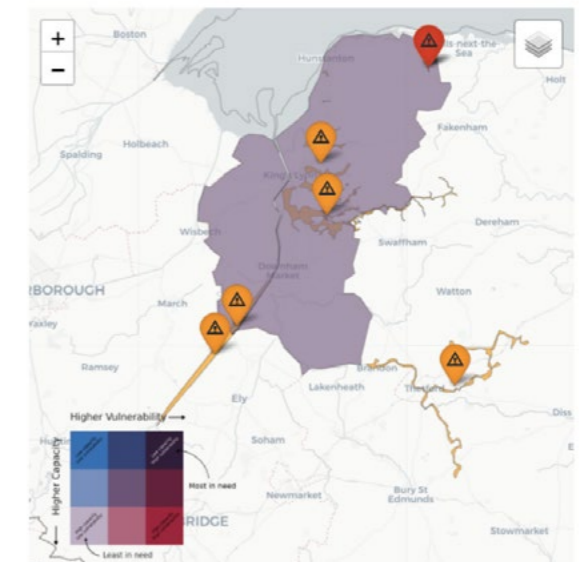
In February 2021, in response to user feedback, we added new features to the tool, integrating with open datasets. This is enabling our users to go from insights gleaned from the tool to identifying new organisations to engage with to make a difference.

“Great tool, it allows us to be inspired, motivated and to be curious about the data and the possibilities it has to change things on the ground as it happens. Happy to explore further and add value from Muslim Charities Forum. Great work!”

*Abubaker Adam, Community Covid Emergency Lead, Muslim Charities Forum*



Areas at risk



The Risk Indicator Portal enables partners to assess geographic areas at risk of an emergency, using local and national demographic, vulnerability and resilience indicators to help identify who may most be impacted and inform response planning.

Photo © Shaun Flannery Photography/BR



## Stranded HGV drivers

In December 2020, our partners Muslim Charities Forum, Salvation Army, and new partner Khalsa Aid, stepped up to feed hungry lorry drivers who were stranded in Dover following the closure of the port. Alongside local organisations, our partners responded as soon as reports of issues at Dover arose, aided by relationships established by the Emergencies Partnership in the weeks prior.

For example, once connected to the local authority, Muslim Charities Forum supported by providing hot meals. 6,820 meals, 6,000 water bottles and 1,000 mixed snacks were distributed by an amazing 65 volunteers and supported by 15 partners.



Photo © Matt Crossick/BRC

## Future emergencies

We continue to run scenario-led tabletop exercises so multi-agency cells can test how they would work together in an emergency, develop their skills, and learn from each other. Our most recent exercise was based on a terrorist incident, with input from Victim Support. 93% of participants would attend another similar event and 80% thought others from their organisations would find exercises useful.

“I think these exercises are extremely important so we can all continue to learn and pick up new ideas from other partners.”

Jenny Newby, Emergency Response Officer, British Red Cross

# Planning for the future

## Our upcoming priorities

We will take the learnings from the last year to develop and improve the response for future emergencies, with the ambition to continue to build connections with local and national partners and to build community resilience to whatever may happen next.

### Next three months

We will continue to strengthen our digital insights offering for use across the sector and work with our partners to support Covid-19 recovery, focusing on supporting sector capacity.

### Next six months




We will take the learnings from the last year and use them to shape our future model.

### Next year

We will have transitioned to a fully functioning preparedness model, ready to respond when the next emergency hits.

## The value our Partnership brings, before during and after emergencies

In March 2021, we defined the value we believe the partnership has and can unlock in the future. We will learn and improve from every emergency, to continue building community resilience to enable a more connected response to future emergencies for those in need.

	We <b>build community resilience</b> in advance of an emergency	We <b>strengthen the connection and coordination</b> of responses	We <b>learn from each emergency and improve how we respond</b>
 Insight	<b>Provide</b> intelligence that guides preparation for future emergencies	<b>Rapidly cascade actionable intelligence</b> that informs response	<b>Shine a spotlight on the successes and learnings</b> from the response
 Connections	<b>Forge and foster critical relationships</b> to bring people together and to provide a <b>voice for the VCS</b>	Link in <b>VCS organisations that can support</b> in an emergency	<b>Build consensus</b> about the most important thing to get right in any future crisis – <b>providing one voice</b>
 Collaboration	<b>Establish effective ways of working to build capacity</b> for responding to emergency situations	<b>Support and coordinate</b> VCS organisations by matching skills and experience with need	<b>Design and co-create future improvements</b> to emergency responses
	<b>PREPARE</b> before an emergency	<b>RESPOND</b> during an emergency	<b>LEARN</b> after an emergency



# Our recommendations

Our research and work with partners has shown that there remain wide-ranging and serious concerns for our partners and the wider sector. Sector capacity has been stretched to its limit but public need is likely to continue to increase and diversify as the pandemic’s long-term impacts become clearer. We remain concerned about funding shortfalls and the long-term sustainability of many sector organisations.

This period should be an opportunity to respond to lessons from the pandemic, to build more resilient communities and improve emergency response infrastructure. Our sector and statutory partners should continue to take action on the following:

**1 Organisations should proactively seek greater coordination and intelligence-sharing at a local and national level, and be supported in doing so.** The Emergencies Partnership has worked to provide structures and processes for experiences to be shared and acted on, that work before, during, and after crises. Preserving such structures while making them accessible to all is a collective responsibility.

**2 Organisations should adopt a human-centred and locally-tailored approach to improving resilience.** Communities directly affected by Covid-19 should be involved at every stage in an emergency; in preparation, response, and learning to help build overall resilience, as well as recovery. Collaboration that works is always built on a diverse range of voices reflective of society, and it is through this that we can create strong and effective emergency planning and response. The government should continue to support the voluntary and community sector in this endeavour. We also recommend that national organisations proactively seek to learn from organisations that work with marginalised communities, and improve their connections with local sector ecosystems, which in turn should receive support in becoming more coordinated where necessary.

**3 Statutory bodies should continue working closely with the voluntary and community sector to increase our resilience, and support wider recovery.** Sector organisations are necessarily involved in most if not all domestic crisis response situations, and public bodies and the sector must understand the nature and potential of such involvement.

Following on from the British Red Cross’s submission for the Integrated Review, and our joint recommendations, we recommend the government continue to work with the voluntary and community sector to ensure they are part of emergency response structures at local and national level. This should include working with the sector when creating the new national resilience strategy, as referenced in the Integrated Defence and Security Review 2021 report. We live in a world with far-reaching new risks and connected challenges ranging from future pandemics to climate change. Civil society and government should form close partnerships now to foster adaptation to these challenges.

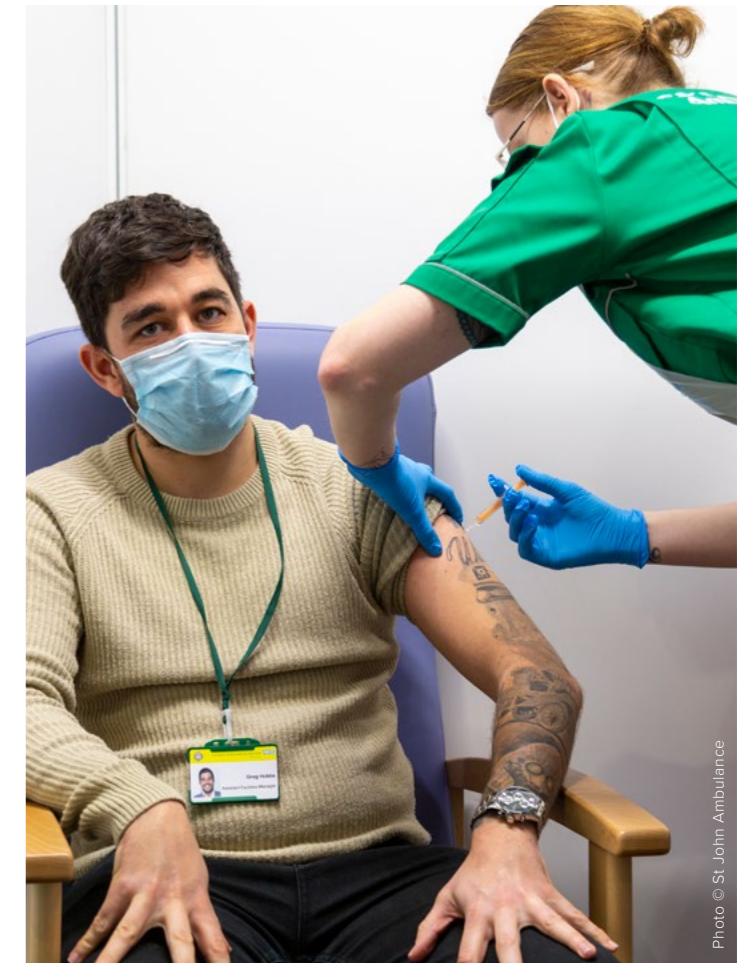


Photo © St John Ambulance

## Renewal of volunteering

The Emergencies Partnership offers a unique proposition – to bring together like-minded organisations and represent a sector’s support to major emergencies.

A united voice is critical to spot-light the experiences of voluntary sector organisations and their volunteers who contribute to the backbone of local response – such as to Covid-19 – alongside pop-up groups, local government volunteering programmes, spontaneous volunteers, national government initiatives, and untold acts of good neighbourliness.

The post Covid-19 volunteering landscape will become more complex, digitally-enabled, fast-paced, and forced to confront diverse demands at scale. The sector’s knowledge of need is informed by a better understanding of the vulnerabilities, risks, and stresses in our communities that have been exposed and accentuated by the crisis. The Emergencies Partnership can help to understand and prepare partners to meet new demands and contribute to a local resilience capability.

The wider impacts of Covid-19 on the sector includes the creation of new expectations from increased numbers of volunteers. Such expectations include volunteers wanting to be urgently deployed to local crises, having flexible forms of volunteering available to them, and the heightened demands of local commissioners in having a local resilience capability that was, evidently, on immediate stand-by.

A challenge for voluntary sector organisations, such as partners of the Emergencies Partnership, may be to capitalise on the opportunities presented by this new landscape. Like many sectors, the changes of 2020 have created an opportunity for the voluntary sector to renew how it operates and strive to achieve new ambitions. Renewal may consider volunteer choice, retention and pathways as well as the collaboration between organised and spontaneous volunteers to reinforce local delivery of local resilience capabilities.

**Professor Duncan Shaw and David Powell**

The University of Manchester, UK

[Duncan.shaw-2@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:Duncan.shaw-2@manchester.ac.uk)

*Duncan and David lead the ESRC-funded Recover, Renewal, Resilience project at The University of Manchester – working across countries to develop community resilience as a local resilience capability.*



The University of Manchester



“The system must work and be functioning, where people, communications, community-based support, professional capability and national authorities are not thought of as separate but as part of a whole”.

*Dr David Nabarro – WHO Special Envoy on Covid-19*



# Thank you

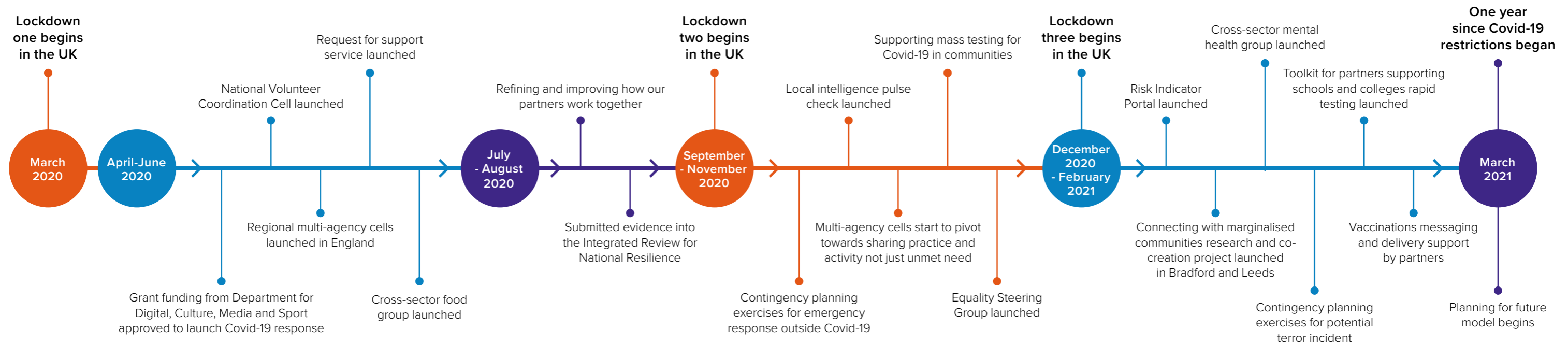
We would like to say a huge thank you to our partners, the Local Infrastructure Network, our Liaison Leads, and our staff and volunteers for the incredible hard work from all to keep moving the Emergencies Partnership forward.



We would also like to thank the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport for funding the Emergencies Partnership and their colleagues for their ongoing support.

As well as our partners, there is a broad network of associate organisations who have supported and strengthened the partnership. Thank you to all of those individuals and organisations as we continue to feel the benefit of working closer together.

# Timeline



Our partners have continued to respond to non-Covid related emergencies throughout the year, including the unexploded WWII bomb in Exeter and flooding across the UK early in 2021.



“The Emergencies Partnership has played an absolutely pivotal role in ensuring the voluntary sector has been able to respond in a professional, well-coordinated and responsive manner to the extreme demands that the pandemic has placed upon us all.

“As founder members of the partnership it has been heartening to see the rapid development and joined up partnership approach to all aspects of the response. Whether that be working closely with Government departments, Local Resilience Partnerships, Local Authorities, the NHS, the Emergency Services and perhaps most importantly in supporting the massive amount of vital frontline VCS activity, where organisations and individuals have literally rolled up their sleeves and supported individuals and families in their local communities.

“The tremendous strides forward taken by the Partnership over the past year have equipped it well for the future challenges of responding to the pandemic and beyond.”

*Adrian Clee, Emergency Response Officer, the Salvation Army*

**Voluntary and Community Sector Emergencies Partnership**  
vcsep.org.uk

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