



Post-pandemic needs in the local charity sector

November 2021

"OCF's generous, flexible and swift response to the challenges of the pandemic has been an absolute lifeline to us. Thank you!"

ACT Oxford

We asked our network of charity contacts how they adapted during the pandemic, what new ways of working have enhanced their services, and what they now need to sustain these improvements. We received 70 responses, and this is what they told us.

“What did you do differently in the pandemic that you have or will carry forward?”

Respondents gave free-text responses to this question. All local charity and community groups said they had to adapt during the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns.



Changes to services were made out of necessity, for example to ensure safeguarding or to communicate in a new way. Services that may have been offered in homes or group settings were delivered on doorsteps over the phone, and in some cases specialised paid support had to be brought in where volunteers were mobilised previously. In many cases this resulted in an improved service to certain beneficiaries.

The move online affected the whole range of charity operations, from Board meetings on Zoom to learning how to do online counselling or outreach consultations. Some charities told us this move had enabled them to reach many more beneficiaries for their services than ever before, and that the need to keep in touch more personally meant stronger relationships had been built.

Partnership working was rapidly accelerated and had to happen without the usual barriers, such as limits between statutory and third-sector provision.

"During the extended lockdown period we formed an even closer support network between members. Most live alone and combating the extreme isolation meant that we set up a system of frequent calls to all our members. Very few people had Zoom facilities so the phone was literally a life line." **Cuttleslowe Community Association**

"Learned how to do virtual consultation – which work better than we could ever have imagined! – making our service accessible to a wider, more diverse range of families from all over Oxfordshire." **Oxfordshire Breastfeeding Support**

"We offered closed sessions for some groups so that we can create a really supportive environment for those venturing out into the world – there is a huge demand for this kind of mixed provision and we would really like to be able to do more of this work, but it is expensive and we need to develop robust referral processes." **Oxford City Farm**

"We moved from only delivering our services face to face to being a digitally led organisation, enabling people with severe and profound learning disabilities to access our programmes in a much more flexible way. Our aim is to have an entirely hybrid approach incorporating face-to-face and digital access moving forward." **Soundabout**



"We learnt how to utilise online fundraising with an online raffle and other community events. We're trying to keep that momentum going whilst also returning to face-to-face events. Costs have gone up though and that is affecting us too." **Let's Play Project**

"Our concern is that digitisation may be seen as THE answer to a number of issues around the provision of care. Although it may be a part of the answer to efficiency and social distanced support etc there is simply no way to replace face-to-face support for those with health and social care needs. Human interaction is an absolutely vital component of real care." **Headway**

"Collaborated with groups and organisations with different demographics from our own and so we cross pollinated ideas and complemented each other's strengths." **AFiUK**

"Having to be creative about having conversations with other professionals, possible funders, etc: the loss of networking opportunities impacted very greatly (particularly for gaining funding)." **Didcot Community Partnership**

What support do you need as a result of these new ways of working?

Respondents chose from a picklist of options to answer this question, where more than one option was available.

In addition to the highlights in the graphic, it was notable that 74% needed more funding of some kind, and 43% only selected funding from all of the options, demonstrating how acute this need is.

"We hope the Oxfordshire Community Foundation knows local organisations like us well enough to know that we are always striving to improve our services – we never stand still. It is core funding, rather than project funding, that is most effective in encouraging innovation. Core funding increases our organisational resilience and allows us the space and security we need to be innovative and forward thinking." **Agnes Smith**
Advice Centre



"The current economic situation has and will continue to increase the number of people struggling to manage financially. We are seeing increasing demand for debt advice at a time when we have come to the end of a contract to provide debt advice." **Citizens Advice West Oxfordshire**

"Our reserves have increased during the pandemic due to emergency funding and decreased expenditure – we hope funders/donors will recognise that reserves show a charity which is sustainable and shouldn't be a reason not to fund charities in the current climate. Our core work is a proven model that works – funding core costs allows us to continue this and support many local families. We'd like the benefits of this to be recognised rather than funders constantly wanting a new project." **Home-Start Banbury, Bicester & Chipping Norton**



"Where the urgency of the situation in 2020–2021 led to an increase in individual donations and involvement in virtual campaigns, this has tapered off as supporters feel the impact of the significant cost of living increase." **Soundabout**

"Fund the organisation to deliver what it sees as the best support to beneficiaries. Focus funding assessment on, for example, the track record, reputation and strategic plans of the organisation rather than narrow project criteria which can sometimes put extra, unnecessary stress on organisations and pull them off course from their core mission. Many funders showed great trust during the pandemic, and from the evidence I can see, this resulted in spectacular results." **My Life My Choice**

"Too often people running successful projects are asked to share knowledge, but they don't have built-in capacity to do this – so training and development funding goes to 'umbrella' organisations that don't have the recent relevant and hands-on experience." **People, Place and Participation Ltd (Flo's)**

Conclusions

- **Digital is not the answer every time** – some services for some beneficiary groups really only work face to face. Hybrid/mixed services are being developed, but they need investment to be set up responsibly and effectively.
- **Charities are professional and knowledgeable** – they have proved themselves to be agile, hugely committed and skilled during this crisis. In return for this they ask funders to trust that they know best how to support the communities they serve, and not place too many conditions on supplying much-needed funding.
- **The needs of communities persist** – and in many cases have been worsened by the economic fallout of the pandemic. Charities face increasing demand at a time where public fundraising or trust applications are more difficult.
- **Charities need investment in their resilience** – to be equipped to keep on tackling these challenges, as well as reap the benefits of more efficient working they saw during the pandemic. For this they need the headspace and stability to build strong strategies, robust plans and reserves of money and energy. This means being willing to supply core cost funding.
- **Supporting charities to work together will empower them to deliver** – for example, by facilitating partnership working and knowledge-sharing between organisations.

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