

Review of Glasgow's Volunteering Strategy;

Responding to the impact of COVID-19

Produced by

Volunteer Glasgow, Glasgow Council for the Voluntary Sector (GCVS) and Glasgow Life.

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Introduction

COVID-19 is a Public Health emergency with unprecedented social and economic consequences. While the scale and significance of the impact is recognised, the understanding and detail of what is required to recover and renew is still unclear.

The COVID-19 outbreak has undoubtedly resulted in a crisis in Glasgow and beyond. Many of the social challenges that we are facing during COVID-19 are not new, the crisis is uncovering inequalities and challenges that already existed in the city and have done for generations including but not limited to; homelessness, poverty, domestic violence, access to food and digital exclusion.

Background

Glasgow is a great city, but we have unacceptable economic and social inequalities, including poverty. Nearly half of Scotland's most deprived (5% and 20%) SIMD datazones are in Glasgow, and nearly half of Glasgow's SIMD datazones are in the most deprived 20% nationally. These economic challenges do not come alone – our people also live with poorer health and wellbeing outcomes.

We can change this, but that is only possible through working with communities – sharing power and responsibility. Strengthening our participative democracy so people influence our shared future, not just through voting and paying taxes, but by giving their time, knowledge, skills and energy. This includes:

- People volunteering – across a wide range of activities that impact on virtually every area of the national performance framework in unpaid roles (by definition), either formally through an organisation or informally in their own way, like helping out a neighbour.
- People leading and organising activity in their communities in both unpaid volunteering roles and in paid employment (all of which has been vital in determining the speed and effectiveness of COVID-19 responses – as the city's previous work on its Resilience Strategy predicted).
- Being included by public bodies in decision-making through robust engagement approaches like participatory budgeting and community councils.

- Being directly involved in the design, delivery and review of services (“co-production”).

There are well understood direct benefits of these approaches for the citizen, for the people they are helping and for the organisations they work with. Each of these also builds and strengthens the relationships between people. It is these relationships, our city’s “social capital” that are critical to transforming our outcomes. Volunteering in its many forms is the golden thread that runs through the above approaches.

Volunteering was identified as one of the first responses to the crisis both through organisations to supporting individuals and communities welfare in lockdown and by individuals responding to being in a crisis and wanting to give their time to help others. This has meant that since March 2020 Glasgow’s volunteering environment has significantly shifted.

Initial response.

Government guidelines have meant the suspension of valuable volunteering programmes and many people who regularly volunteer not being able due to them or their families being within vulnerable health categories. The Pandemic has generated new grassroots mutual aid groups and encouraged support for neighbours activating acts of kindness between those who have not previously known each other. Established Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs) in the City have experienced much greater demand than usual, some have suspended services and activities and others have rapidly diversified to meet local emerging covid-19 needs. This has resulted in a number of challenges

Supply outweighs demand – huge volume of individuals registered to help but limited opportunities.

Maintaining engagement with existing volunteers - a large proportion of services suspended and therefore volunteering programmes. People who state they volunteer for social connectedness are at risk from deteriorating mental health.

Safeguarding – many organisations and mutual aid groups have reported that the demands of the evolving public health guidance and regulations were mitigated by the safeguarding guidance and updates first published by Volunteer Glasgow in March.

Managing volunteers remotely and developing management systems - for many organisations, moving staff, services and processes (such as volunteer recruitment) online has been a slower and more challenging process than they envisaged although many reported that progress was being made

Reduced staff/ board members – many organisations have suspended services and the volunteering programmes which help deliver them during lockdown, furloughing volunteer management staff, while others have struggled with staff illness.

Developing new roles – many organisations which have remained active or open and/or which pivoted to delivering new services for the covid-19 response have tended to mobilise and redeploy existing staff and volunteers rather than recruiting more people for the new roles created.

Reduced funding, Increased demand for more resources alongside reduced community fundraising and usual income streams.

Rationale for a Volunteering Review

As we begin to exit from lockdown and plan for the future, while considering emerging trends, it is a commonly shared view that old ways of working can no longer be supported just because they are how we have always done things. There is an opportunity to consider the type of society we want to see, and how volunteering, community and third sector activity can help us achieve this.

In “building back better” we should aspire to maintain and mobilise the community spirit that has been shown by our citizens. To begin this process it is important to review whether our strategies and structures for facilitating volunteering and community action are fit for purpose to lead that work.

The proposal for a review was presented to Glasgow’s Community Planning Partnership on the 10th June. This was well received and the recommendation to review the Volunteering Strategy and Action Plan for 2019-24 and volunteering infrastructures in light of Covid-19 response was approved, mandating Glasgow Life, GCVS and Volunteer Glasgow to take forward.

Scope of the Review

“Our vision¹ is of a Scotland where each of us are empowered to participate and contribute to a fairer, wellbeing economy in different ways: through properly rewarded paid work but also through a variety of appropriate, unpaid roles - that are often undervalued – including the distinct roles of unpaid (family) care and volunteering. We continue to share the Government’s vision of a Scotland “where everyone can volunteer, more often, and throughout their lives” [[Volunteering for All, 2019](#)]

The city is currently working within currently working within The Glasgow’s Volunteering Strategic and Action Plan for 2019-2024. The need identified and response to COVID-19 does not render this invalid but does necessitate a fundamental review of the services and infrastructure that support the aspirations and recognised value, socially and economically, to citizens, communities and Glasgow. It is anticipated that through a phased approach the current Strategic objectives will be revised to reflect current learning and information. It will be focused on getting the most effective and efficient use of resources and infrastructure for the city.

¹ This is Scotland’s Third Sector Interfaces’ vision statement for empowerment and volunteering. As members of that network and partners in Glasgow’s TSI, GCVS and Volunteer Glasgow subscribe to this vision.

Approach

The phased approach will be underpinned by principles of engagement and inclusion which mirror the Glasgow Volunteering Charter Principles.

The initial phase is research and analysis using the data we already have and information collected from surveys carried out since March 2020. This will be led by the newly formed Glasgow Volunteering Strategy Governance Group, Policy and Research Sub Group.

The output will be a clear statement of what the evidence already tells us and a set of hypotheses that we will then go on to test with stakeholders.

The second phase will be engagement with as many stakeholders as possible to discuss and debate the hypotheses to begin to firm up into clear understanding. This will be done in one to one meetings and using some virtual discussion groups.

The third and final phase will be to review the strategic objectives against the second phase output and make recommendations to the GCPP and thereafter the Social Renewal Taskforce on a) the policies, programmes, services, and activities that will best achieve the revised strategic objectives, and b) the short, medium and long-term actions which would best use the available resources to maximise delivery of the revised volunteering strategy objectives.

This review will be resourced through existing budgets but consideration will be given to external analysis and facilitation to support challenge and inclusion.

Governance

The review will be led by an executive group on behalf of GCPP with members being the three agencies that have a leadership role in the strategic development of volunteering in the Glasgow –

Volunteer Glasgow; lead on the volunteering strategy, volunteer recruitment and volunteer management

Glasgow Council for the Voluntary Sector (GCVS); represent and support the third sector organisations that host the majority of volunteering opportunities

Glasgow Life; with key responsibility for volunteering for major city events as well as large volunteering programmes supporting culture, learning and sport in the city

The executive group will engage fully with GCPP members and report progress and recommendations.

The executive group, on behalf of the GCPP, will report into the Social Renewal Taskforce to engage with wider stakeholders and to embed the recommendations in the city's renewal plan.

Resources

As noted above under initial response (challenges), many volunteer involving organisations in the third and public sectors are experiencing greater than ever pressure on their income. Many have seen reduced income from trading activities and fundraising. Many therefore have less resources to support and enable formal volunteering. In addition, resources currently allocated specifically to enable, develop and support volunteering through infrastructure services are also under pressure.

It should be noted that decisions on many of the resources that will be required for delivering elements of the city's Volunteering Strategy are not within the gift of the executive group nor the Community Planning Partnership as a whole. Nor are some of those decisions able to wait for the review recommendations.

The review will instead seek to inform the resource decisions taken by individual partners and organisations.

Timescales

This is a time limited review and it is anticipated that initial recommendations will articulated by October 2020.

Summary

The volunteering landscape in Glasgow has changed due to Covid 19 presenting challenges and also some really great opportunities to "build back better". The review will explore what is working well, highlight lessons learned and identify areas for improvement. The findings will enable partners (and prospective partners) to provide recommendations on how we best utilise reduced resources to work more efficiently and effectively.

The recommendations will define the optimal combination of policies, programmes, services and activities for maximising our achievement of the revised strategic objectives, benefiting more volunteers, beneficiaries and our communities. The review will ensure that the future of volunteering in the city aims to achieve the vision outlined in Volunteering for All, 2019 and Glasgow becomes a place "where everyone can volunteer, more often, and throughout their lives"