THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON BAME LED COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS A FOLLOW UP

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ABOUT THE UBELE INITIATIVE

The Ubele Initiative (Ubele), a civil society organisation based in London, works across the United Kingdom and Europe with disadvantaged communities; most notably black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities.

Ubele (taken from Swahili to mean 'The Future') is an African Diaspora led intergenerational social enterprise founded in 2014. Our primary mission is to help build more sustainable communities across the UK.

We have developed through a bottom up, community-based approach and although African Diaspora led, our culturally diverse team supports a wide range of communities and community-based organisations and groups through social action, community enterprise development and next generation leadership initiatives.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION, CONTEXT AND CHARACTERISTICS

One of the extraordinary things about human events is that the unthinkable becomes thinkable.

- Salman Rushdie

To say the coronavirus pandemic has not had a global and consistent impact on lives, institutions, politics and societal norms, customs and practice is an understatement and would be the clearest indication of denial and complacency. As at the time writing (30 October), the global cases stand at 44.8 million while the deaths amount to 1.1million. [1] In the UK, we have seen major and sharp increases in both infections and deaths in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. In England, in particular, we have seen both cases and deaths increase significantly throughout September coming into November, which has seen local restrictions imposed in an attempt to suppress the rate of infection and so avoid further deaths.[2] As a result, all aspects of life have had to adjust to what is becoming a much longer and deeper crisis. Preparing for the long haul is perhaps the order of the day and none more so for those working in the community, voluntary and charity sector; and in particular those working with Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, who have been the object of our research from the outset of the pandemic.[3]

[1] https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/

[2]https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/conditionsanddiseases/articles/coronaviruscovid19roundup/2020-03-26

[3] See https://tinyurl.com/yasv6489 (https://www.ubele.org/our-research)

That piece of work arose because it was clear from the early stages of the pandemic that the crisis was impacting disproportionately on ethnic minority groups in the UK and as a grassroots catalyst social enterprise supporting the BAME sector regionally and nationally, we felt it important and necessary to better understand what was taking place and to determine what support (if any) those organisations we were working with would require [4].

This follow-up report arose from one of the recommendations of the initial report, where we indicated that a more in-depth follow-up should be undertaken to better understand not only the journey under the pandemic but to determine what more could be done to support micro and small organisations who were then on the brink of closure. The aim being, in part to determine if our initial findings would bear out over the three months from April given our then prediction of nine out of ten BAME led organisations closing if no funding was secured [5]; and in part, to see what (if any) new challenges or innovations is taking place in view of a 'new dawn' spreading across the social and political landscape as we ease down from the 'first wave' of the pandemic. In that report we offered the following summary which provides the context against which to view this 'deep dive' analysis and report:

Given the everchanging pandemic landscape (we are now moving into 'second wave' scenario), we may not be able to look too far ahead, but we can focus on the immediate needs of those negatively affected and those supporting those affected or at greatest risk of having been affected. The response to the surveys shows that many of the BAME charitable organisations have been or are in a state of flux. Some are pivoting around changes to their business model and new ways of working, while others are struggling with the prospect of closing.

Whether we wish to see the glass half-full or half-empty, Covid-19 has created a chance for the sector to regroup, rethink and to make a 'fresh start' (or re-boot in today's digital parlance); it has perhaps given us all a renewed chance to work together in different ways: funders and fundees; beneficiaries and providers; government and civil society.

Finally, the crisis affords the many micro and small BAME organisation the opportunity to rethink not only how they deliver on their charitable purpose – for whom over 50% were engaged in work related to citizenship and community development – but, coming out the other side of the crisis (i.e. the recovery phase), being braver, more agile with a clearer focus on strategic planning, delivery and risk management. In short, thriving organisations.

[Murray, April 2020; pp.36]

The approach

At the heart of the research approach was the need to hear from the voices of those on the ground; those directors and trustees overseeing the development and implementation of programmes to support those most vulnerable. The lived experiences of those on the ground was therefore central to our approach [6].

The approach adopted was to research and analyse information obtained through two principal processes:

- Online survey of 137 micro and small BAME led organisations identified from our Wave 1 and Wave 2 survey (March to April);

- One-to-one structured interviews with a target sample of 21 groups drawn from the 137 identified organisations using purposive sampling approach to identify the sample group: regional split; size of organisation based on NVCO definition; charitable purpose.

Additionally, a parallel Rapid Review of the impact of COVID on protected groups was undertaken by Manchester University and Ubele which afforded the opportunity to conduct further and additional interviews on the impact on voluntary and community social enterprise more generally across London [7]. From this approach 53 one-to-one or group-based interviews were conducted by Ubele, which has helped to shape the report and its findings.

[6] See Murray K and Rolston Y (Sept 2020):
https://static1.squarespace.com/static/58f9e592440243412051314a/t/5f7d95645a8dd315c8ec4dd8/1602065770242/Ubele+Rapid+Review+-+VCSE+Analysis+report%2C+October+2020.pdf

[7] Murray K and Rolston Y (Sept 2020) Op cit

Characteristics of responding organisations

The survey and deep dive structured interviews took place from 17 August through to 30 September. From the 137 targeted micro and small organisations, we received responses from 31 organisations (Fig 1). Of this:

- Thirty-two percent (n=10) were interviewed on 1-2-1 basis while 68 percent (n=21) completed the online survey, which covered the same questions as those involved in the 1-2-1 structured interviews though not as in-depth (see Fig 1).

Fig 1: Responses by information gathering approach (n=31)
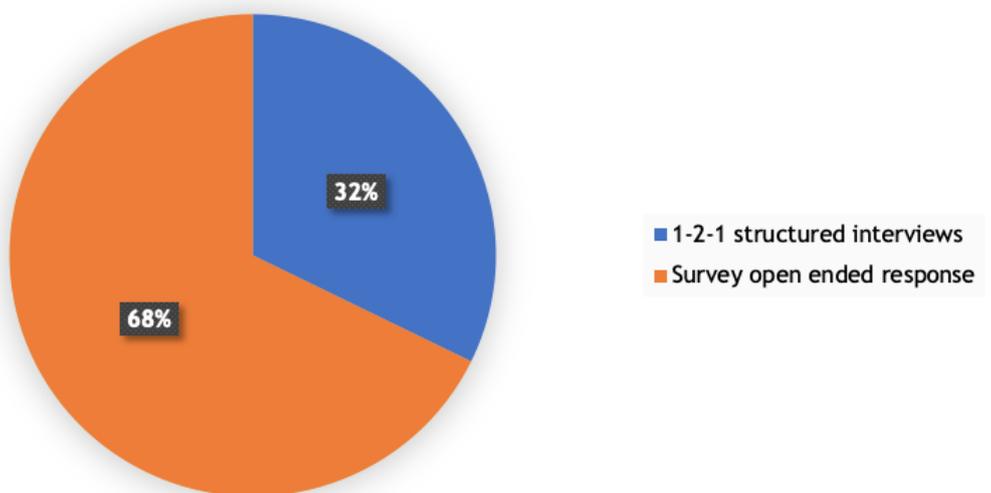
- The overwhelming majority of responding organisations were located in London (48%) followed by those based in the North West (26%) – see Fig 2.

- While Waves 1 and 2 used the NCVO definition of income to determine organisational size, based on the filed income of the 137 organisations at Companies House and the Charity Commission for the full year 2018/19, we established that the median income level was £50,000. In view of this we re-categorised the NCVO's definition to better reflect organisational size by income as follows:

  - Micro (less than £10k);
  - Small (£10k to £50,000)
  - Medium (£50,001 to £100,000)
  - Large (£101,000 to £1,000,000)

By so doing we sought to better reflect a more realistic and accurate organisational size as the NCVO definition was far too broad in describing a 'small organisation', which was income over £10,000 and under £100,000. Our initial survey had shown that many of the organisations who were then in crisis, and at risk of closing within months, were those with incomes of less than £15,000 overall. This approach enabled a more targeted support approach to those organisations who would benefit most from the support programmes that Ubele had established as well as a better picture as to the true size of the sector, given that 82% of the voluntary sector is estimated to comprise micro and small community and voluntary social enterprises (NVCO, Almanac 2020)[1].

Based on our categorisation, as Fig 3 shows, 32% of responding organisations were micro organisations; that is, having an income of less than £10k, while 39% were in the medium band, that is having an income over £50k but under £100,000.

Fig 2: Responding organisations by region (n=31)
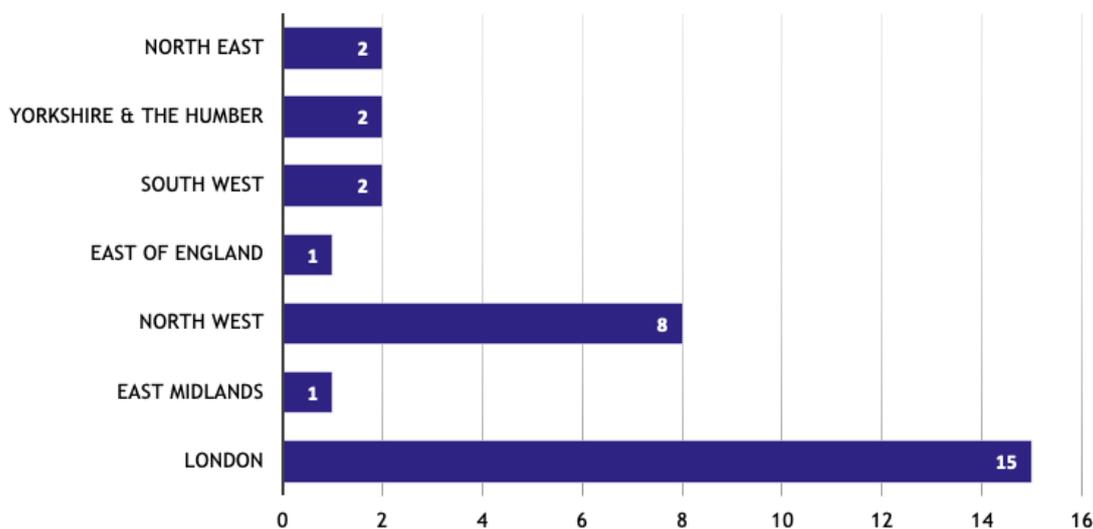
Fig 3: Responding organisations as proportion (%) by income size (n=31)

[1] See https://almanac.fc.production.ncvocloud.net/executive-summary/
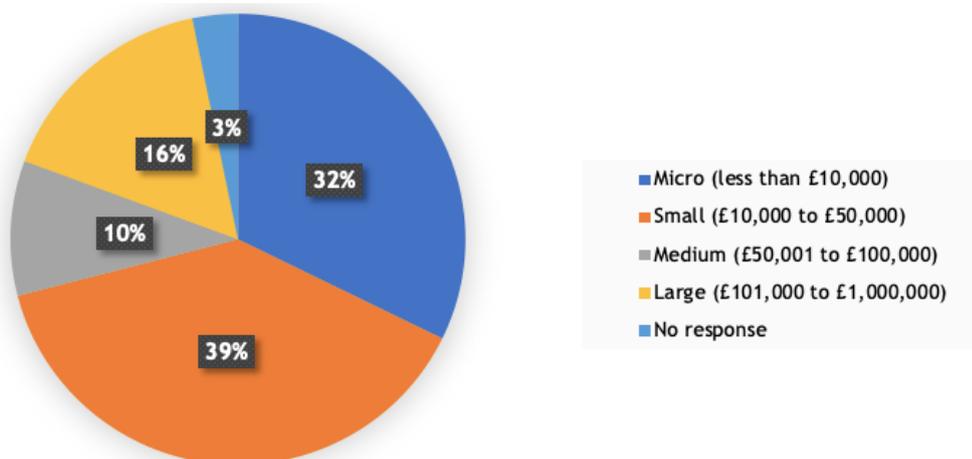
- The majority of respondents were the CEOs, Founders and Directors (68%), which indicates the leadership of the responding organisations. Their responses are therefore more than likely to be reflective of the status of the organisation and therefore add credence to accuracy of the responses from an organisational perspective (Fig 4).

Fig 4: Proportionate (%) breakdown of respondents by role and position in organisations (n=31)
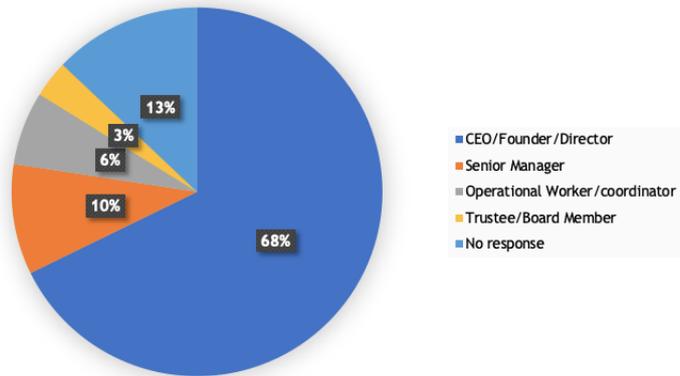
- The overwhelming majority of organisations worked with the following three most cited beneficiary groups (Fig 5):

  - Disadvantaged children and young people
  - Immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees; and
  - Those experiencing mental health concerns.

Fig 5: Frequency (beneficiary type worked with)
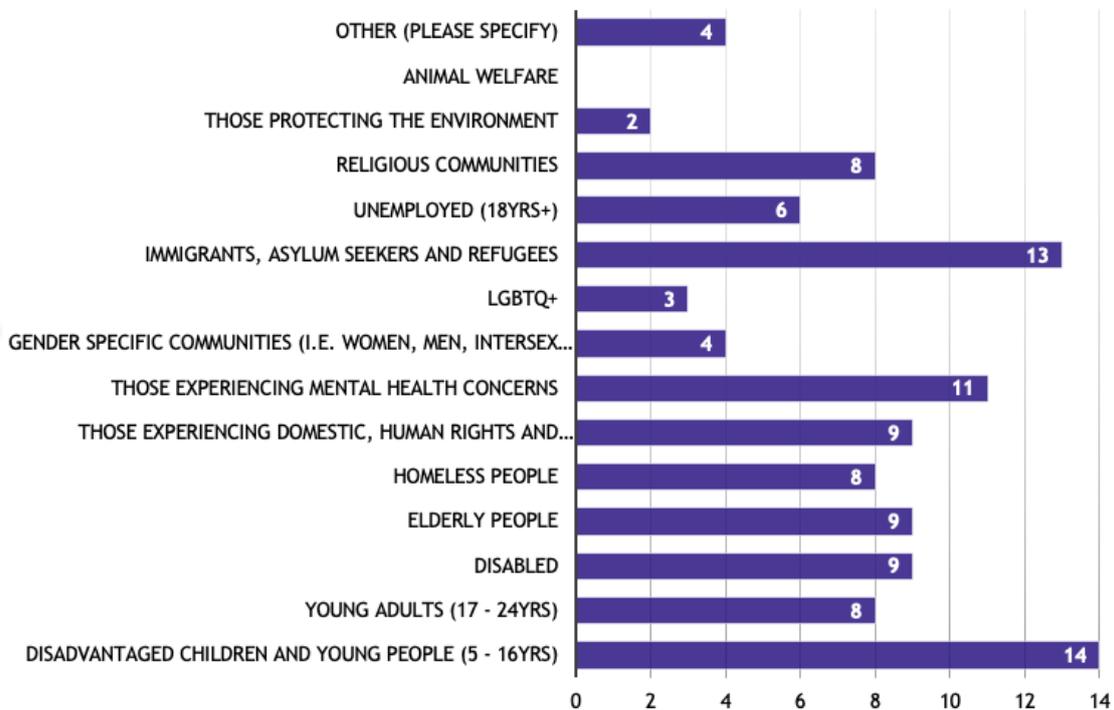
IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE INDIVIDUAL

Respondents were asked to comment on how they had been impacted upon by COVID-19 at a personal level as well as the impact on their organisation.

At the individual and personal level, responses reflected the following key themes:

- Disbelief and confusion
- Health concerns
- Access to resources and provisions
- New skills and opportunities
- Relationships, custom and practice

Representative comments include the following:

Disbelief and confusion

It was a little hard to find information because it was constantly changing and understandably it was a pretty fluid situation, [and] I'm sure the government didn't know what they were doing.

I think with everybody else, there was confusion all around, so the information was hard to come by and whatever information that there were, was pretty confusing. So, people didn't know what to do.

I've never experienced anything like this before, it's like watching a movie but you're in the movie and you have a role...

Insecure status means that people like me become vulnerable to dreadful circumstances...

Health concerns

I didn't like the fact that hospitals weren't doing autopsies.

It was quite daunting for me initially, especially when they started talking about do not resuscitate, because they didn't really explain what the ventilators were; they didn't really explain at the time that if you've got medical conditions the ventilator can be more harsh and more life threatening. The messaging perhaps should have been saying "do not resuscitate and no ventilation for over a particular age with underlying medical conditions". The first thing that came to your mind was okay, so are you saying that we are not important enough, you don't value us enough, all our contributions that we put in is non-existent and you don't care!

Because of medical reasons, I actually stopped going out just about a week or so before the lockdown; I actually stopped going out at the end of February.

New skills and opportunities

It's enabled me and my organisation to be able to establish and create a stronger structure and base in regards to what we are doing and in us going forward.

I'm a bicycle mechanic and it's a hobby of mine, so being furloughed from my position, my full-time job has enabled me to fix bikes and just deliver my passion and I've been so happy with that.

Everybody is finding new ways to work and not doing the same events and activities that they were doing before.

Access to resources and provisions

My mum didn't have WI-FI, so she can't use WhatsApp. And you just think … oohhhh … she would have been able to see all of us over the last six months but she just hasn't been able to and when we tried to get her WiFi they wouldn't come into the house to fix it.

I had to change the whole way that I engage with people and I've found it quite limiting and difficult to get information as well.

It has definitely been challenging, financially and ethically.

Trying to get food to a family who had COVID-19 was hard.

Relationships, custom and practice

We're all trying to survive under some unusual and uncertain conditions.

I would have liked to have taken care of my elderly parent, but I can't due to social distancing guidelines.

I lost a loved one and it has been difficult but manageable.

It was awful because when my son was murdered, we didn't get the opportunity to say goodbye; relatives couldn't go into the hospital. It didn't matter if people had Covid or not, you just weren't able to go and see them.

What these concerns and experiences tell us is that individuals are being impacted on in many ways, with experiences of family, friends and colleagues contracting the virus and, in some instances, experiencing loss.[8] What these quotes and conversations told us is that individuals involved with micro and small community based organisations are finding themselves straddling personal trauma arising from the crisis while at the same time fronting and delivering services to communities in need with limited capacity and support; and in many cases, families going through similar (if not worst) situations. It is perhaps not too surprising, when taken as a whole, we begin to see a cyclical process taking place; one which mirrors to an extent the 'seven stages of grief'[9].

[8] See https://static1.squarespace.com/static/58f9e592440243412051314a/t/5f7d95645a8dd315c8ec4dd8/1602065770242/Ubele+Rapid+Review+-+VCSE+Analysis+report%2C+October+2020.pdf

[9] See https://www.stages-of-grief-recovery.com/7-stages-of-grief.html

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE ORGANISATION AND SERVICE DELIVERY

One of the most striking aspects of the lockdown was the need to stay safe through social distancing measures, in addition to washing of hands, covering the mouth and nose and use of personal protective equipment. Organisations, therefore, had to be very mindful of what they were able to do which was a position that many reinforced in their responses.

At the organisational level, respondents were asked to comment on how they coped:

- During the national lockdown (covering March to June); and

- Easing down phase from national lockdown (July to September).

Based on the responses, both quantitative and qualitative information:

- 10% (3) of responding organisations had closed coming out of the national lockdown period (March to June);

- 55% of responding organisations had adapted their services to be online (Fig 6);

- Of those that indicated delivering services online, 82% were micro and small organisations (Fig 7)

Fig 6: Responding organisations adopting online delivery approaches (% split)
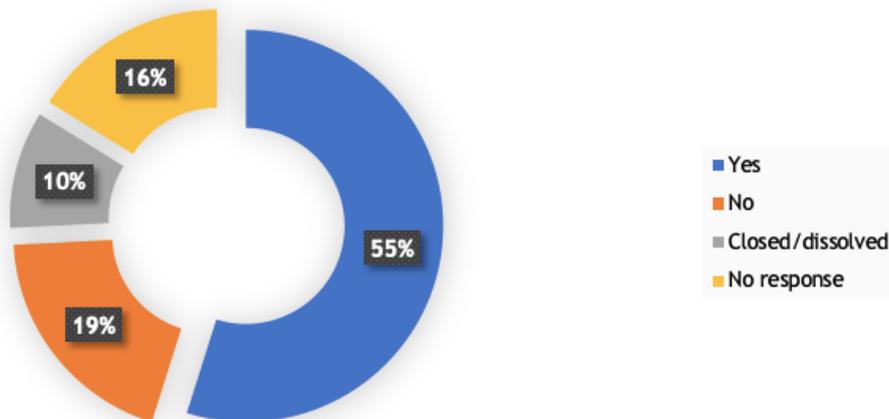
Fig 7: Organisations moving to online delivery by size of organisation (n=17)
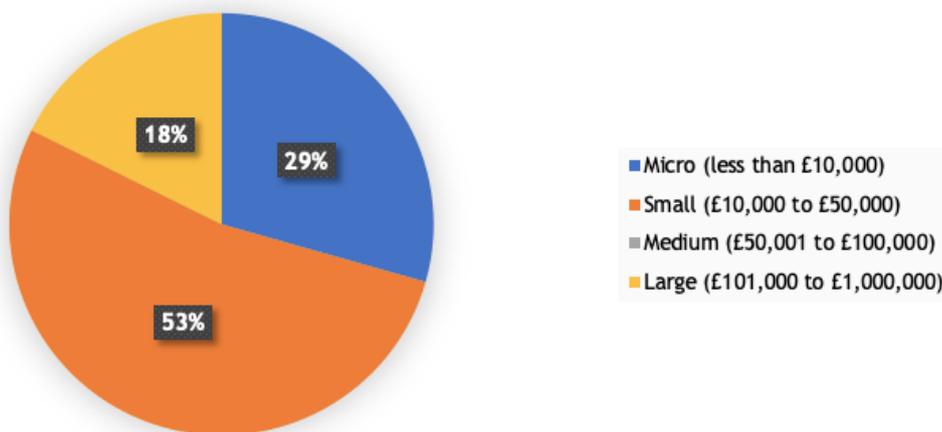
Comments from respondents highlighted some of the opportunities and challenges that organisations were encountering. Respondents' comments ranged from adapting and moving their services online to changes not only to how they now deliver services, but what new services they were now offering.

If you used online platforms to deliver your services, can you tell us what services and whether this had increased or decreased take-up?

We have managed to deliver most of our services online.

We have moved most of our services online and have had one face to face session, with a group of young people.

Counselling at home is interesting but different. We are used to seeing client face to face with the work that we do. Some of our clients are ok with telephone 'counselling', but some did not want to have telephone call or zoom calls which can make it difficult.

We've had to reduce the hours that we have with young people, we have moved everything online.

It has forced us in a way to use virtual tools, which is good, but we know that work with our client face to face is better, especially for younger people, but it's something that everyone seems to be working through and with at the moment.

Within how you now operate, what will need to change or improve in order to make your organisation thrive over the period September 2020 to March 2021?

Since COVID started I have not traded in public; I have started to load a lot of stuff up online from March to April and between April and May I've officially started to make sales from my online stock.

I need to have a marketed campaign to drive traffic to online, I have new stock, one of my suppliers is closing down so I was able to get 15 boxes of new books to see which has been great.

Usually when we see client's face, we are able to give them the documents to sign and read through them in person and have them answer any question if necessary, this has not been the case unfortunately working virtually.

One of the things I was able to do was spend a lot of time phoning around and going online and finding PPE for people, so they could just go to work. It was a lot of hard listening to find out that that was what the real issue was because people were thinking, "Oh they don't want to come to work." They do want to go to work, they are afraid because they've got no masks or gloves, so I had quite a lot of conversations with the Council about that and I didn't think they'd heard me, but they did. A few weeks ago, in a meeting, the Deputy Leader said that they've obtained a consignment of masks that they can give out free of charge to people.

We had to cancel our live performances which reduced our revenue, we had to reduce our student fees because some of the students are from low-income families so they could no longer afford their fees, so we just had to make allowances there to enable people to still engage in the activities.

For the organisation it has been challenging because Covid-19 has greatly impacted the arts sector with lots of venues completely closed and they still haven't reopened to their full capacity. It has really impacted the sector as a whole because we don't have a venue to rehearse in.

It is almost as though our business and fundraising endeavors has been shifted completely over night with the pandemic. If the crisis hadn't happened, we would have been getting people ready to perform.

Financial support and development

We sought to gauge the financial viability of organisations so as to get a sense of sustainability during the early period of the crisis and as we move into the easing down phase. The interview questions that were asked sought to elicit an understanding of the financial positions of organisations as they were coming into the new financial year ahead of the pandemic (i.e. financial year starting April 2020) as well as during the pandemic (i.e. access to COVID Emergency Funds). From responses to this area of investigation, we found:

- 52% of respondents held one month or no reserves coming into the new financial year starting April 2020, with only 1-in-10 (10%) holding the minimum recognised level of reserves over three months (Fig 8).

- All the responding micro organisations either had no reserves or only one month of reserves and those classified as being small organisations were more widely spread across the range provided (see Fig 9).

Fig 8: Reserves held by responding organisations coming into 2020/21 financial year by months held (% split)
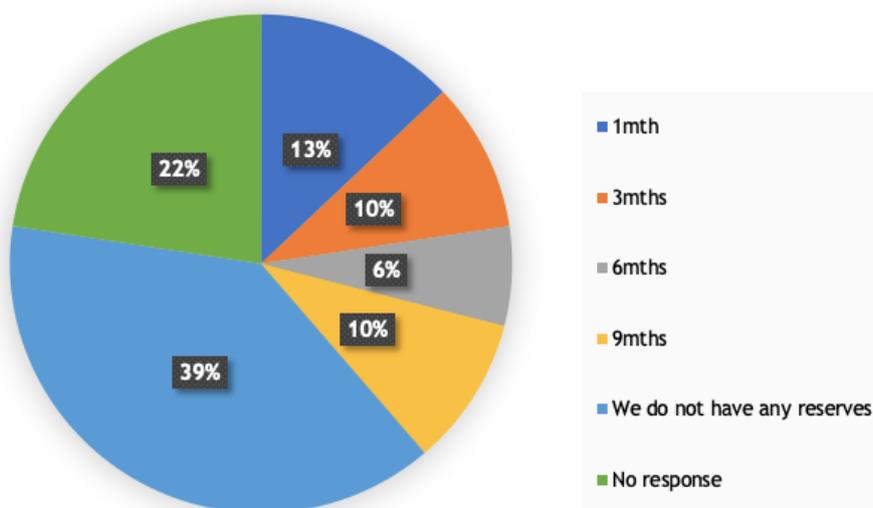
Fig 9: Level of reserves held by organisation size (by months)
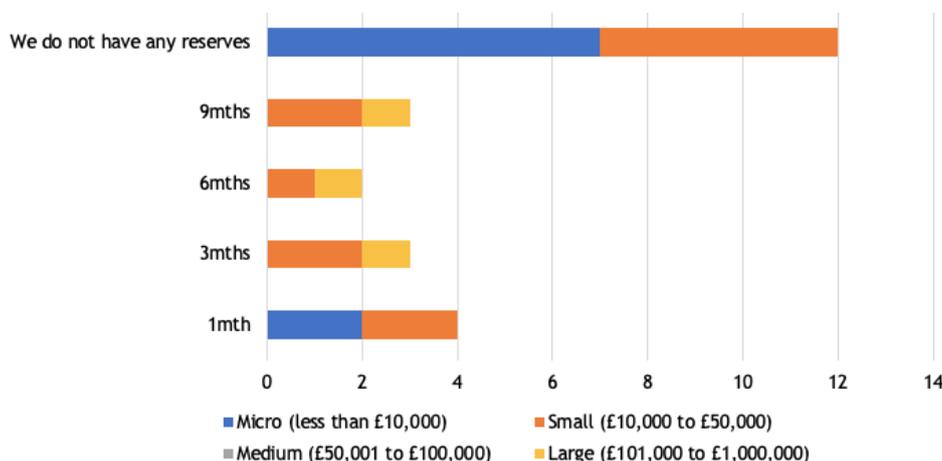
- Based on their 2019/2020 secured income position, the average size of the funding was just under £15,000, the majority of which were 12 months funding through local authorities, National Lottery Community Fund, BBC Children in Need and the Arts Council. Surprisingly, some respondents were successful with 'lesser known' funders, some of which were locally focused funding bodies, such as, for example, the church. The size of funding secured further attest to the organisational size of respondents, in that the funders indicated tend, on the whole, to offer small grants upwards to £10,000, with a few exceptions noted (i.e. National Lottery and the Arts Council).

Illustrative comments include:

We secured funding through the National Lottery and now awaiting decision from Berkshire Community Foundation.

We received some funding from United Saviours and the Southwark Community Fund towards premises cost.

Funding had been secured through The Arts Council where we received £30k and from Positive Futures, where we received £20k over 2 years.

The local authority [xxx] Ward funding programme and the National Lottery.

We got £38,000 from the Arts Council and £10,000 from the Postcode Lotto.

We received funding from various unions and church funds.

We had some funds from our police 'Constabulary' because there was an event that we ran that we were passionately wanted to develop: 'Introduction to Social Justice'.

We were successful through the local authority grants programme and the Arts Award Access Fund.

The Armed Forces provided us with small pot of funding to engage BME communities. Every so often people come to us, all of which have been small funders. It is nigh on impossible to get funding for infrastructure and core services; you have to deliver a project.

The [local authority] community fund provided us with £7,000 to buy equipment, to pay staff, to update our software and to do some well-being sessions and training.

We applied for funding from the local authority but secured funding from the police commissioning department, the city office and the Final Reduction Team Network.

We did not get any grant or any funding from anywhere. From April 2019/2020, we had this programme and we had a couple of little revenue projects to do with the green energy projects such as through Electricity North West which was about £8,000 alongside a number of other little projects that got funded (i.e. an ESOL environmental project).

From different grants we have secured £140k from a range of funders that took us to August 2020.

We were successful with our BBC Children in Need application that came in just in time to start in April 2020; that was good news as every little helps.

Coming into the new financial year (2020/2021), the income range that responding organisations were anticipating ranged from £5,000 to £250,000, with the overwhelming majority looking for between £5,000 to £50,000. This is consistent with the organisational size of responding organisations indicated in Fig 8. What came through was the support organisations received through the Emergency Funding programmes that had been put in place, with some indicating that without these funding programmes, they feared they would have closed.

Comments included:

Coming into this financial year we estimated maybe about £5,000 that would come from fundraising donations, but we have exceeded that through securing some 'Covid Emergency' funding.

We are a small organisation with an average income of £10,000.

It's really hard to say but based on our average income over previous years, I would say about £15,000, though we would hope that it would be more.

As a locally based network, we were anticipating £20k for what we want to do but so far we have only managed to secure a few £'000 through local community foundation and local authority.

We were looking to secure no more than £20,000. The way we're thinking now as Directors, as a result of what's happened, we're now comfortable to stay with part-time admin support and what we're doing on a Manchester footprint, we're comfortable.

We were expecting to raise between £50k – £100k but so far, no way near this. We are still waiting to hear about two applications made to national programmes. We don't believe we stand a chance, but we try anyway.

For the whole year we hoped to have secured between £200 to £250k to help with staff salaries, building costs, equipment and all the other extras that we do in our business. This is not likely to happen and we have already started to lay people off. We will have to reduce our service by end of the financial year.

Not all organisations were successful in securing funding through the range of 'Covid Emergency Fund programmes' that existed between March to September. Of those that responded to this question (Fig 10: n=24), half (50%) had received COVID-19 Emergency funding at the time of writing. The overwhelming majority of those that indicated being successful in securing Emergency funding (Fig 11) were based in London (42%: London Community Response Fund: Waves 1 to 3) followed by the North West and North East (17% each). Comments from respondents who were not successful highlighted some of the difficulties being faced by micro and small organisations. These difficulties reflect the challenges that all voluntary and community social enterprises face, especially those falling within our income band ranges.

Fig 10: Emergency funding during COVID n=24
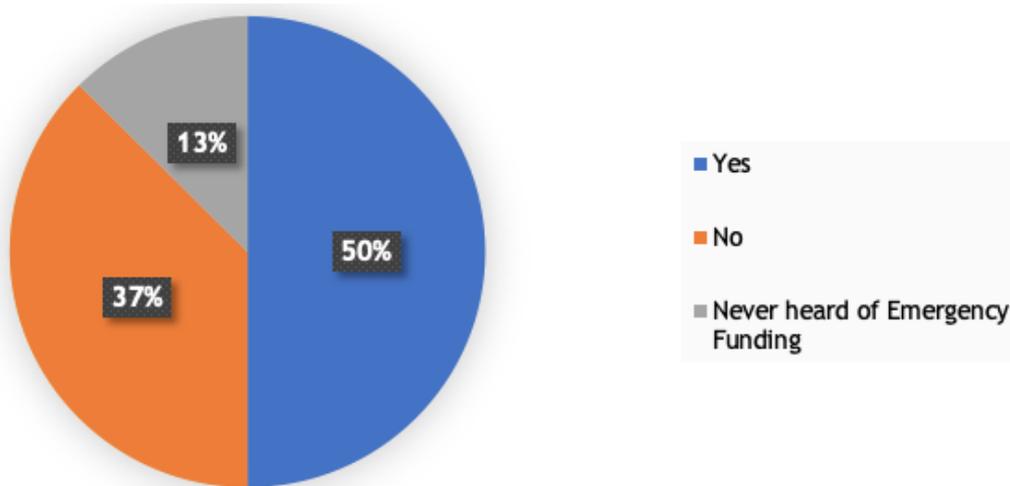
Fig 11: Regional split by emergency funding receiving organisations (n=12)
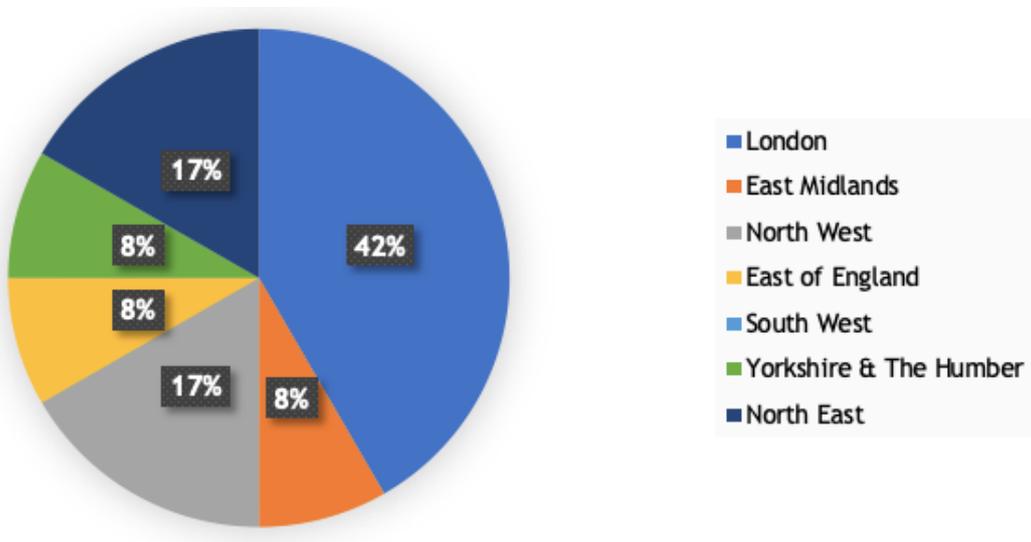
Funding is great but applying is very much time consuming and we could really benefit form support to help us fundraise for our current services and ideally to develop new services long term.

It's time consuming and it's not easy, especially if you're not a bid writer; you are going into the process through your passion to do something rather than your knowledge and they want stats you don't have.

We applied for some local authority business support last week and we're waiting...

We received a response from our local authority application which was declined on the basis that "This doesn't meet our criteria." I wrote back and said, "That's interesting, because two Councillors have told me that it does." One of the things they did, that we thought was really out of order, was when they sent us the response that said "No". It's ok that they can say 'no' and when they say '...it doesn't meet the criteria,' but what they actually said was, "Why don't you go to the Housing Trust, they've got money." I don't want to, I don't want to do that, that's not a proper response, but they didn't sign the letter. It's a CVS, it's the local CVS that is managing the money; I thought, where's the name, put your name on it! So, when we responded back, I said, "Can you give me the name of who is sending us this correspondence?" They need to be accountable and it's fine that they've made it, but they do need to be accountable. You can't just say 'no' and then hide behind the company logo!

A lot of the bigger charities get the money, and the issue is that a lot of them already have resources, such as full-time employees whose job it is to find funding. Small organisations, like ours, don't have that, so as soon as money is being made available all the big organisations run forward and get the money and that's just not ok.

Someone sent me an application form to fill out and the deadline was very short...so you know that's what is difficult because not everyone knows how to do an application form. It's about how you read what they're actually asking you for and sometime you write it out and you think it's a good application but when you read it, you realise it didn't answer the question and then you have to go back again.

As we ease down out of the national lockdown, for many of our responding organisations, the future looked somewhat bleak and uncertain. Of those who provided a response to the question of how they saw the future as we eased down out of lockdown (n=26), 77% indicated a high degree of uncertainty, while 23% were optimistic, with some securing Emergency funding that could see them through for at least a full calendar year (Fig 12). Those who reflected a sense of optimism highlighted changes to their service delivery model, while those who were uncertain about the future highlighted concerns over their financial position, which, when compared to their level of reserve coming into the financial year being non-existent, it was therefore not surprising. This was particularly the case with those who were not having much success with funding applications (see Fig 10 above).

Fig 12: How do you see the future as we ease down out of lockdown? (n=26)
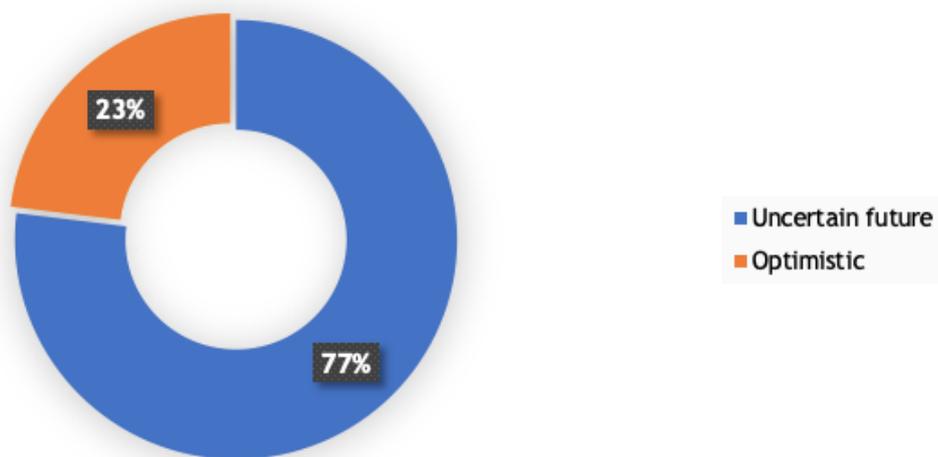
Some of the comments included the following:

Level of optimism

I have just been running the business through book sales and personal cash injections. I've started to identify some little ideas that I want to try out with some people I have approached, which will involve online sales.

We feel that from the two organisations where we got funding, we can use that as a platform to demonstrate track record and success with other organisations. When you are new and just starting out, you are not known, you're not trusted. For example, we have been helped through the Lottery funding (small grant).

I think if we're true to our belief we will secure the £20k we need to maintain the organisation over the coming months.

Through the funding we've so far generated, which will take us beyond up to December, after that we don't know what's going to happen. Well the other things we have done is develop our workbooks which we will be revamping to start selling Amazon, start developing some merchandise for sale in order to generate some income.

I don't think COVID will hit us too hard this year; we are more worried about next year.

Level of uncertainty

We applied and secured some funding to deliver a festival, but now since this is no longer possible, we are looking to see if we can agree with the funders to repurpose the grant. If not, we may have to return the funding.

Even though we are applying for funding, we can't be sure what will happen with our business. We were relying on our usual income streams but with the social distancing restrictions likely to be in place over a longer period of time than initially anticipated, we have had to cut back drastically. Our clients are used to face-to-face engagement and now these restrictions will impact massively on their willingness to participate online. This is proving to be the case where domestic violence is the issue.

We are awaiting the outcome of our most recent application while still applying to other funders as so far, we have been unsuccessful.

It's uncertain because we've only got enough funds to take us to the end of our financial year (November 2020). The problem with the funding is they give you a deadline for when you can spend that money and you have to give a report as to how you've spent the money, so you can't take that money over to the next year unless it is specified. So, it means we today I am having to be doing reports and stuff, and we have to start looking for funding. The difficulty being a small organisation is that you're running the workshops, you're overseeing stuff, you're making sure the people you're commissioning to do certain workshops are there, then you're looking at promoting the workshops so you have the capacity etc. And so, to get an application completed is quite a task.

I've had some funding to go into schools which obviously has not been possible, so I've had to consider giving the money back or change the way we were delivering our service altogether. we are unable to put on any fundraisers, which would usually bring in funds.

If the current funding remains in place, we would be scraping through. We are under threat of the funding being removed if our target numbers aren't reached, which will leave a big hole in our reserves.

It's now exactly 6 months since I have not traded at an event. So, for nearly 18 years in business, the past 6 months have been very quiet. Going online has been more about keeping a presence, and in no way has been able to address the shortfall. For me no events meant no revenue, and since they might not be back for a while, I need a really robust online campaign to reach my customers and a significant chunk of the online buying community UK wide and beyond.

SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT

Respondents were asked to comment on their use of digital platforms during the lockdown to determine the extent to which organisations had either moved their services online or whether that proved difficult and hence, likelihood of closing down. Of those who responded to this question (n=26), as Fig 13 shows, 65% were using online platforms, with more micro organisations and small organisations under £50,000 moving online (Fig 14).

Comments based on interviews indicated that the move online was not without its problems and difficulties, though on the whole more people found them to be more helpful than unhelpful. The type of online platform being used, for example, was a factor for some organisations as reflected in the concerns being raised while for others it was a case that they did not have the capacity or ability to reshape their service to fit the online platforms currently on the market (e.g. Zoom, Skype, Teams etc).

Those who had accessed and were able to transform their services to benefit from online presence, reflected a sense of greater 'reach' and new approaches that they had not previously considered. To grasp the different perspectives, we have split the narrative responses into three broad categories for ease of reading:

- Unhelpful experience;
- Opportunities provided;
- Successful experiences.

Fig 13: During the lockdown, did your organisation use any of the online platforms? (n=26)
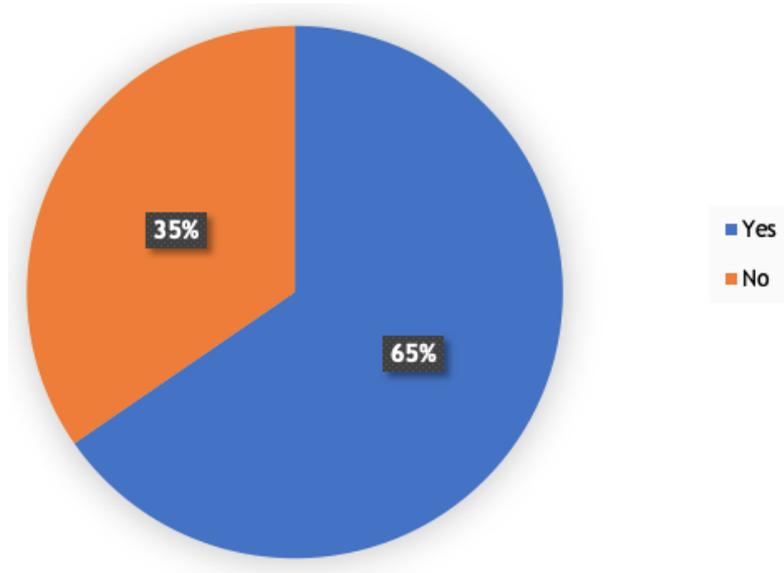
Fig 14: Organisations moving to online delivery by size of organisation
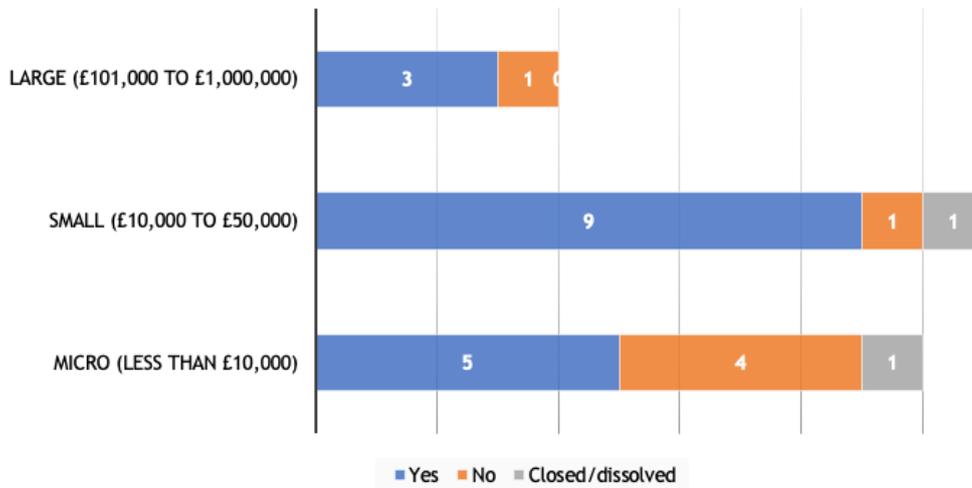
Unhelpful experiences

Remote working is not suitable for our organisation as so much of our delivery relies on face to face work with young people.

We saw a drop-off of participation. I don't think that for a lot of people it's that they don't have the means to access them, it's that they don't understand it and just think that it's going to be awful, it's going to be really hard. As soon as you say, "You just need to download Zoom," you can hear them shut down and turn-off…They don't want to learn about it and they're not interested in learning about it.

Although we have been working on Zoom to meet the needs of some of our current clients this has not increased our uptake with new client as most client prefer face to face.

This has been a disadvantage to us because we are a dance-based organisation and the lack of the physical connection is a major concern. The young people we work with have told us that some of them cannot engage online and so they just didn't come. They said they couldn't learn from teaching online. Others really, especially the younger ones, don't really come for the dancing they come for the social element, which is completely lost on Zoom, so that has been an issue. We can't recreate that. The feedback is that they've said they miss being in a studio because they don't have the space to dance and because they live with their families, they have to negotiate some space with their family members which was not always possible. I would see kids dancing literally next to their beds, in the corridor, in the kitchen, there's just no room for them to be fully effective without also managing the safety element at the same time.

The easiest to use is Zoom, the pain is Teams, but for some reason almost every local authority decided to use Teams. I've used Skype a couple of times.

If we look at the community we serve, new technology hasn't helped in the delivery of the services because it's more hands-on face-to-face tangible services that we provide. On the staff level working practices, yes it has helped. If I don't need to come in the office anybody can access me or we can have team meeting.

Opportunities provided

Though I have yet to go online, I am keen to interview authors via some sort of podcast and then upload a link to the website with the book of the author that was interviewed. This would also help to direct customers to the entire website and the catalogue of books that we have on offer.

One of the members, she's in her 80s and she's shielding, and her son bought her a tablet. He downloaded Zoom and handed it through the window and it was really funny because she was able to log on and we could hear her shouting at us, but she couldn't figure out how to put the camera on, but between us we were able to say, "Do this on the screen," until she did it. And you think, wow, she can take part now, whereas last week she couldn't take part. So, it really is that simple and she was able to see that it really is that simple. Particularly with the elderly, we are maybe approaching it the wrong way by trying to teach people how to operate all the stuff on the tablet and on the phone. If someone can put Zoom on it, they can take part.

In fact, the person I'm talking to you about is in her 80s and she's now able to contact her family in the Caribbean and see them. So, for 10 minutes of laughing at each other and she was getting really distressed and "I can't do this," but actually now she can see her family.

Successful experiences

Being on Zoom has enabled more people to be engaged than not. When we have meetings now, there's 20/30 people. When we had physical meetings there may be a dozen, now when we have Zoom meetings we can all pile in. We may not all stay the length of it, but we are able to interact and be on that meeting. I've just arranged a meeting where physically I'm going to see someone. It's been planned for a while, in a leisure centre, but even then, he says, I'll try and get there, but if I can't get there, we'll Zoom it. So, I'll be at the leisure centre and the leisure centre manager may be somewhere else on a Zoom. It's a new way forward.

Young carers take up has increased.

Most of the charitable organisations that I know of in Watford have moved to Zoom meetings and they did that very quickly because they had the IT available and because the council pushed it but we found that we needed to focus on people that don't own a tablet and don't own a phone.

Our take up has increased, people have look forward to the bulletin and our members were very engaged.

Respondents were asked to reflect on their support and development needs over the six months to March 2021 and to indicate up to five key areas of support that they believe they will now need as easing down processes had begun. As Fig 15 below shows, the four key areas of greatest support need were:

- Capacity building support (28%)

- Access to grant funding support (20%)

- Strategic and business planning support (18%)

- Access to online digital working support (18%)

**Fig 15: Support and development needs
between September 2020 to March 2021**
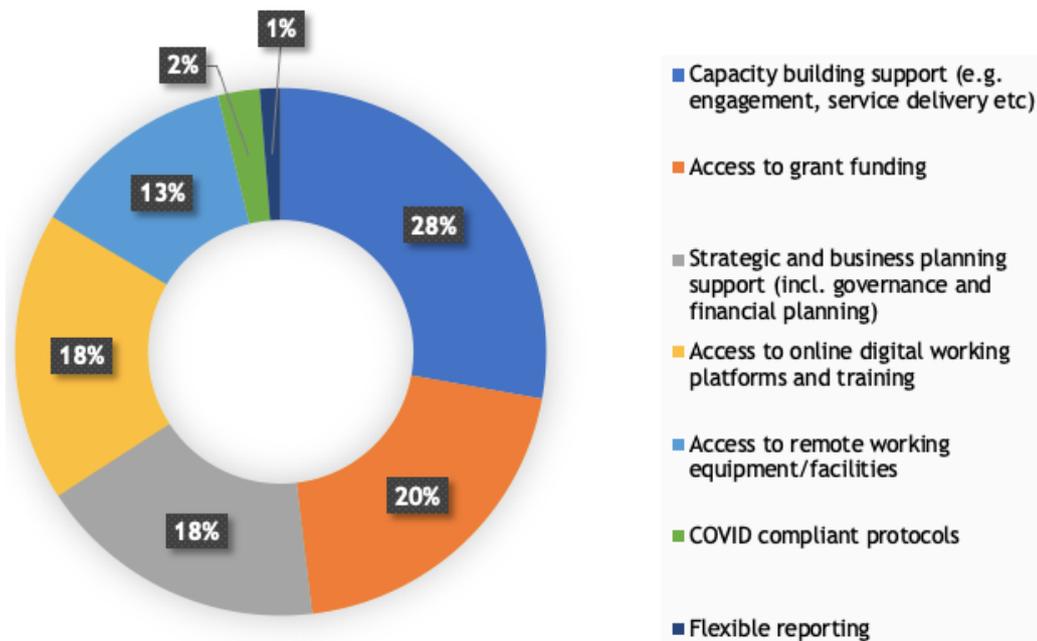
Comments by respondents provide us with some insights as to what organisations are seeing as concerns. We have clustered comments around four themes of support and development needs or priorities. In response to the question of summarising their experiences since lockdown, on the people they serve, support received and what the experience so far has shown them, we hear voices of hope and optimism as well as voices of despair and frustration:

BAME communities locally are still dealing with the pandemic and we need to find better ways to support them, especially around mental health and finances. [name of organisation] has seen a huge demand in our work from health services and organisations at a time when it is harder to engage directly with BAME people. We feel like there is almost a flood of desire to engage without understanding what the actual issues are for BAME people are right now.

We have noticed that governance has become an issue and questionable with regards to online safety and security.

Good communication is key to the success of any relationship. With it relationships cannot thrive, during this time I have realised that building relationships is paramount. Not just through a text message but actual conversation. Many people just want to know that someone cares and someone is listening. The main difference during this time has been keeping up communication. Checking in on people, just to hear their voices. Sending meals, food and groceries to those that cannot get out. As time goes on, we anticipate more people needing help by way of food and company. Even if that company is socially distanced, showing that you care will be the number one priority.

I have been pleasantly surprised at the number of recovery grants suddenly made available where it looked as if we met the criteria. However we have applied for a number of smaller grants and been rejected - not because we fail to meet the criteria but because organisations offer us less than the value of the project which means we cannot go ahead or suggest that we apply to another grant elsewhere.

Specialist services such as ours are now being recognised and valued and seen as a needed support service. It would be helpful if the funding opportunities available during Covid would continue through more long-term funding opportunities.

As we move into the renewal and transformation phase, we would like to see the improvements to our services and real support for this deadly disease. They cannot now ignore our needs and we must have the voice to inform on what our support looks like.

It's now exactly 6 months since I have not traded at an event. I have been in nosiness now for nearly 18 years and the past 6 months have been very quiet; the worse. Going online has enabled us to maintain a presence but in no way has it enabled us to address the shortfall in the finances. For me no event has meant no revenue, and since we are not likely to see such activities again for a while, we need a really robust online campaign to reach customers, especially developing new and emerging online buying communities across the UK and beyond. So, there are possibilities going forward, which we will want support to develop.

The major lessons learnt from COVID - 19 is that life may never be the same and that the way we deliver our services must be hugely transformed with more provisions online. Even if we can return to the normal ways in which our services have been provided, it may take some time and health and safety will be the backbone of how we now deliver programmes.

Linked to the question of capacity support, which, as indicated in Fig 15, was the most frequently cited support need identified, we sought to explore one of the recommendations that arose out of the main report published in May 2020 around the possibility of a national BAME infrastructure support body. In that initial report on the impact of COVID-19 on BAME led community and voluntary organisations, we indicated that BAME led organisations might benefit from there being a nationally recognised coordinating 'BAME infrastructure body'. Respondents were asked to indicate to what extent they believed this would be helpful and to offer any thoughts and/or experience they may have on the matter.

Twenty-one (n=21) respondents responded to this question. Fig 16 shows that more than half (54%) of those who responded to this question believed that such a body does not exist and therefore would be welcomed. It is clear from the responses that there appear to be some confusion as to whether such a body currently exist (23%), and we should therefore be looking to improve it. Of note is the fact that just as many (23%) were not sure if such a body is needed. This would suggest some further work is required if such a body is to become a reality. However, comments arising from the structured interviews seem to suggest that there are benefits of having such a body with local and regional focus on influencing policy makers for the benefit of the sector. Those who saw the benefit of such a body commented on having "…a strong voice for the sector (e.g. giving visibility to the sector)" and giving "…access to regional and national policy makers", while those who were ambivalent, felt that they needed more information and any such body should not be too 'London centric'.

Fig 16: Is there the need for a 'national BAME infrastructure body'? (n=21)
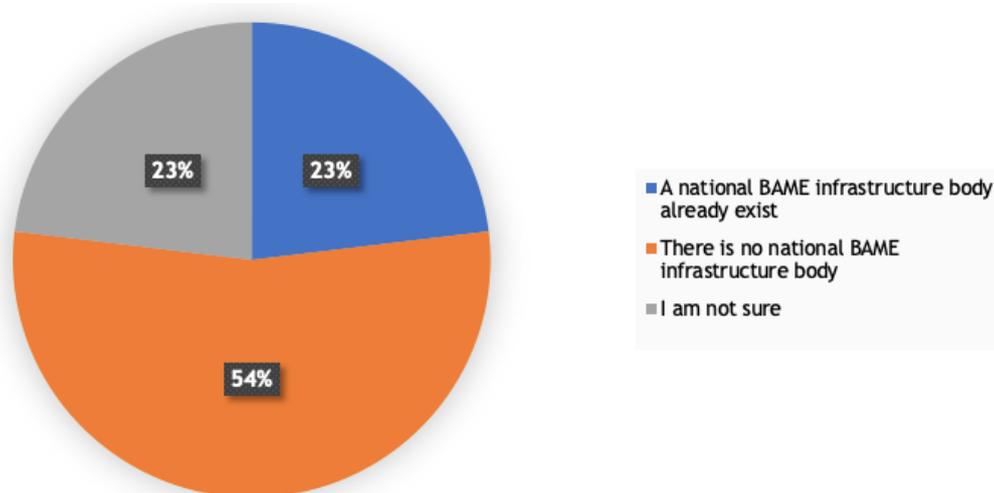
I cannot confirm whether this exists already and therefore would welcome more detail.

There used to be a few [but] they were too London centric.

There are many infrastructure bodies, but an umbrella group is needed.

It would be better to have a regional BAME infrastructure body as a national body would not be able to represent everybody. The term BAME is very misleading. The things that affect the Black African and Caribbean communities are not the same as the Asian communities. Nor the same as the Minority Ethnic, therefore any infrastructure body that does not recognise this will fail. There would need to be a National African Caribbean Infrastructure body along with Asian and Minority Ethnic Infrastructure body. This way representatives from each sector could galvanise their respective group issues under one banner to present it to a governing body for the consideration of implementing and influencing policy.

It is important for BAME organisations to begin the process of having a national co-ordination body to provide support in major areas like training, funding, health & safety etc.

There are organisations such as [...] that do this work, but it would be more effective if such organisations could join forces and include other BAME focused large organisation together and work together.

I would add that policy influence is key to sustaining change (i.e. a voice at the decision-making tables). Very few groups seem to either understand, are willing or able to attend network meetings, policy events etc to ensure that their view is heard.

Voice4Change England has done some analysis of BAME support needs - I know they have been meeting with funders long before C-19 was even a thought – and have been highlighting issues of underfunding.

An observation arising from these commentaries imply two possible considerations that are worthy of further exploration. The first is the recognition of what we'd like to call 'catalyst organisations' and the second, 'infrastructure support' organisations. With respect to the first notion, respondents were able to name a few organisations that they thought were infrastructure support organisations but in fact those organisations are more 'catalyst organisations', in that they work proactively to generate ideas and concepts in addressing social problems (e.g. The Ubele Initiative is an example of a catalyst organisation while London Plus, for example is an infrastructure support organisation). Catalyst organizations are an asset in supporting new initiatives and ideas to the tackling of seemingly intractable social issues. They provide opportunities in supporting other organisations by giving them the chance to challenge existing paradigms where there is a need for social action (i.e. incubation spaces for micro and small organisations to develop and scale). In this, these organisations seek to develop practice on the ground that are crucial in driving change as a 'catalyst' within the change process. They are therefore not the same as an infrastructure organisation, which might be part of the confusion (i.e. that *"…there are many infrastructure bodies…"*).

An infrastructure organisation, on the other hand, is one whose main or only purpose is to support the work of other groups in the local voluntary and community sector, often through providing information, advice and guidance on the one hand to the wider community and voluntary sector; and on the other hand, contributing needed training and support usually in the form of capacity building programmes as well as advocacy. London Plus, the capital's infrastructure volunteer and voluntary action support body, for example, defined infrastructure organisations in the following way:

"*At its core, infrastructure consists of three things which together provide a backbone for community action:*

Knowledge about the community; the local voluntary and community sector; statutory services; and volunteering.

Capacity to put this knowledge into practice; to mobilise and direct volunteers; to support local organisations and groups to be effective; resources to work with statutory services to ensure these are well-targeted to communities.

Connections so local organisations are plugged into the right channels to be useful and effective, including through partnerships with statutory bodies."[11]

[11] https://londonplus.org/news/london-plus-submission-to-danny-kruger-mps-review. London Plus facilitates the London CVS Directors Network which represents organisations providing local infrastructure support to charities and local community groups across the majority of London boroughs. There are 29 infrastructure organisations in the network who support over 20,000 voluntary and community organisations across London.

However, many of the presumed infrastructure organisations tend to operate 'locally' (or borough-focused) and are not specific or targeted to 'left behind' or invisible communities' such as Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, who are the focus of this report – and those that are, such as the Croydon BME Forum, Black South West Network and Manchester BME Forum are very much local entities. Voice4Change England, perhaps comes the closest to the definition of an infrastructure organisation though it is unclear from their website and from respondents, the overwhelming majority of whom failed to identify them as having a national infrastructure support role.[12] It is this specific need and national voice that the Black, Asian and minority ethnic organisations operating within the civil society community and voluntary sector space requires.

[12] https://voice4change-england.com/about-us/

CONCLUSION AND REMARKS

What have we learnt about the BAME voluntary and community social enterprise sector (VCSE) as a result of the COVID-19 challenge? What are the changes that need to be made at the personal as well as organisational levels as we move into the post COVID-19 scenario? One thing we are already seeing, is that recovery will take time. If the 'infection' rates continue to rise as they appear to be around the world, including here in the UK, at the moment, then we could be looking at living under the current 'restrictive' conditions for at least another year – if not longer. One key message to come out of the Ubele reviews since April is that we cannot just step back to what was, but rather, we need to take a positive step toward how we now live our lives and the role and function of the VCSE sector. If nothing else, the pandemic has shone a light on many 'hidden' and not so hidden inequalities across swathes of society, impacting disproportionately on BAME communities, in particular the Asian and black communities[13]. As we go forward, those BAME led organisations that are at the sharp end of community-based service delivery will need targeted support to continue the work more than ever. Given that the vast majority of micro and small organisations are driven by individuals with a strong sense of social justice, often these organisations are interdependent on that individual. Consequently, the line between personal and organisational needs are often blurred to the point where organisations are literally kept afloat through absolute voluntarism without any funding whatsoever. Such models are unsustainable under the conditions we are now facing.

[13] Ethnic inequalities in Covid-19 are playing out again – how can we stop them? (see: https://www.ippr.org/blog/ethnicinequalities-in-covid-19-are-playing-out-again-how-can-we-stop-them)

At the personal and individualised level, we found that these individuals experienced a sense of disbelief and confusion in the initial phase of the pandemic then moved to a phase of 'accepting' that hitherto relations, customs and practices had to change in how they now have to live. From an organisational perspective, Founders and CEOs now found themselves presiding over a changed and reshaped organisation within a charitable sector that is highly dependent on grant or donation funding. With resources and support already limited during what may be termed 'normal times' (e.g. financial and accommodation support), under the crisis, this had been further compounded and exacerbated. Based on the interviews and the responses to the surveys more generally, we found that on the whole people went through certain phases of emotions that drove their actions. This is reflected diagrammatically in Fig 17.

Fig 17: Impact of COVID-19 on the individual: a thematic and conceptual model
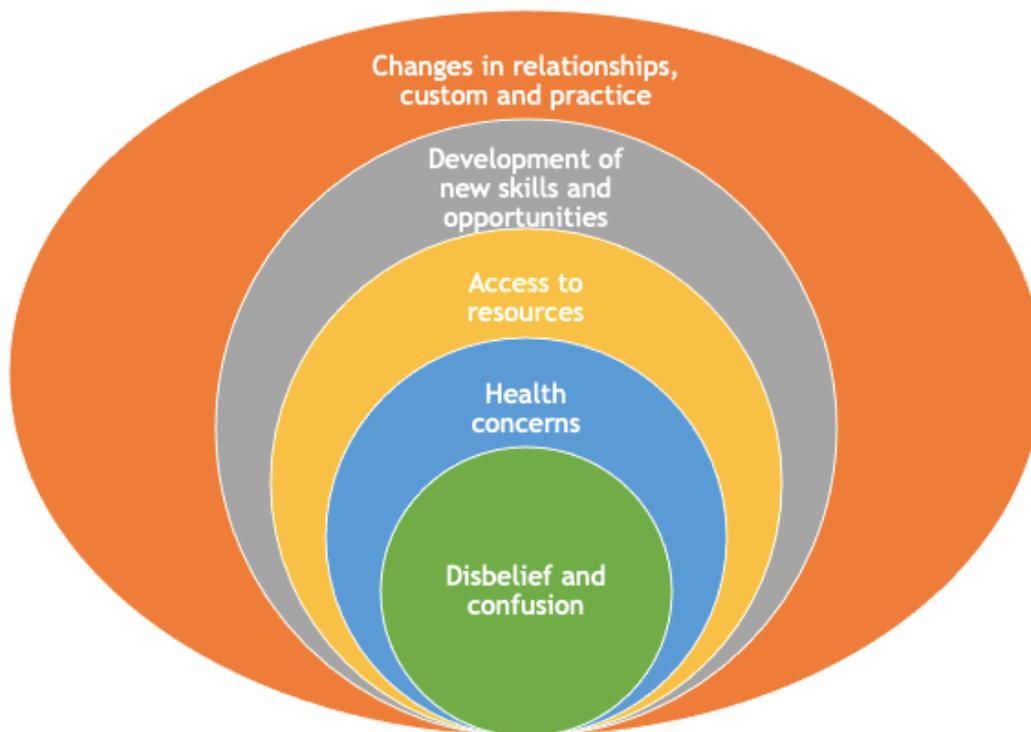
Reshaping organisational practice

The initial report published in May 2020 indicated that 87% of micro and small BAME led community and voluntary organisations may close within months of the national lockdown. It also noted that there were some measures and support that organisations could draw upon to help address their precarious position in light of the pandemic. As a result of their size, many continued to deliver services in a strictly voluntary capacity (with staff furloughed, working without pay or laid off) while at the same time trying to cope with the impact the crisis was having on their personal lives.

Following the May 2020 report, Ubele and other strategic infrastructure and campaigning groups, such as Voice4Change England and #Charitysowhite, in particular, argued with some degree of success for resources for the sector. The Ubele report attracted some national attention and spurred on national funding charities - London Community Response Fund (Wave 3), Comic Relief, National Emergency Trust, the National Lottery Community Fund and Resourcing Racial Justice - to recognise the specific needs of BAME led community and voluntary organisations and so doing, created targeted 'funding streams' (e.g. through Covid-19 Community-Led Organisations Recovery Scheme CCLORS, the Phoenix Fund, Comic Relief/NET sponsored programmes and Resourcing Racial Justice). We know from the responses that organisations found the Emergency Funding programmes an important lifeline. However, for some of our responding organisations, this did not prevent them from closing during this period as indicated in Section 3. The indication from responses to this deep dive scrutiny suggests that we are close to a situation described by Nazroo et al (2020)[14] as "widespread financial crisis for VCSE organisations that are representing and supporting those with protected characteristics," principal amongst which are racialised minority communities.

At this organisational practice level, we heard from organisations having to 'reshape and redesign' how they now must deliver their services, or dissolve. The responses indicated that organisations had to adapt in order to survive; at least over the short to medium term. We noted that many respondents went through a phase of having insufficient capacity to meet the needs and the demands of their beneficiaries, while at the same time trying to influence policy and decision makers. Evidence showed that organisations would benefit from support across five emergent priorities if they are to survive over the medium to longer term; a period unspecified as there is currently no vaccine available and therefore the real likelihood of the virus lingering well into 2021. The five thematic priorities indicated below are also diagrammatically captured in Fig 18, with an indicative outline of some key support objectives presented in Table 1:

1. Capacity support needs (i.e. organisation's ability to respond to needs and demand)
2. Access to financial resources (i.e. grant funding etc)
3. Adaptation of services to meet online digital opportunities (i.e. platforms)
4. Continuity and strategic planning Policy and influencing

[14] Nazroo et al (2020), Rapid Evidence Review: Inequalities in relation to COVID-19 and their effects on London; Greater London Assembly; September 2020 (https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/rapid-evidence-review-inequalities-in-relation-to-covid-19-and-their-effects-on-london)

Fig 18: Organisational support and development priorities
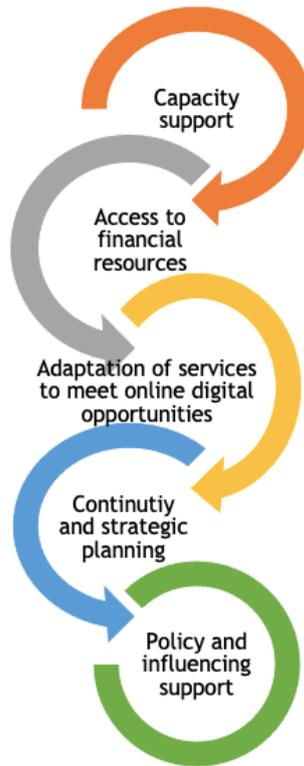
Table 1: Support and development summary programme plan (tentative)

Organisational support priorities	Examples of types of programmes/seminars
Capacity building support	Governance and leadership (e.g. skills, confidence and practical tools; strategic planning).
Access to financial resources	Financial support and resourcing (e.g. Cashflow, Fund raising and investment opportunities etc).
Adaptation of services to meet online digital opportunities	Digital competence development alongside access to platforms (e.g. tools and skills for digital onboarding and inclusion etc).
Continuity and strategic planning	Collaborative and partnership working, sharing facilities and community engagement which links in with policy and influencing objectives.
Continuity and strategic planning Policy and influencing	Establishment of/or development of an effective national infrastructure body that would provide a strong voice for the sector (e.g. giving visibility to the sector), leadership and campaigning support to the sector across all regions.

This approach and consideration also link well with some emerging thinking around the development of infrastructure support arrangements for BAME led organisations.

From the initial data gathered, it appeared that there may be a need for a national BAME infrastructure body. However, as some respondents have indicated, there is a belief – though not universally held – that there exists a number of 'national infrastructure bodies' and as such, perhaps more work should be done to develop them as effective bodies. The mere fact that respondents believed there to be 'numerous' national infrastructure bodies, is itself a concern and one which indicates multiplicity of voices, some of which may be contradictory and confusing. Indeed, some respondents have indicated fear and ambivalence to such a development as they have been 'burnt' in the past where they believed they had been 'used' by such bodies who they felt swayed with the political wind of the time. A typical response reflecting this viewpoint puts in thus:

> *We've been burnt by infrastructure organisations and so we're cautious of accepting projects and funding and then building up internally and having a larger organisation that actually in two years' time when the political agenda has moved it moves too. We'd rather build up slowly and deliver what we need to deliver with regards to engagement and ensuring that BAME communities have a voice.*

Overall, more than half (54%) of those who responded said that they did not believe there existed a national BAME infrastructure support body, and as such, suggest that further work is needed to explore what this could mean as part of the reshaping of the 'sector' as we learn to live with the virus and its implication over the longer term. One respondent, in exasperation, pointed to a lack of understanding about the capacity of micro and small organisations and as such, indicated how a BAME infrastructure body could play an enabling and supportive role. The respondent remarked:

> *BAME communities locally are still dealing with the pandemic and we need to find better ways to support them, especially around mental health and finances. We have seen a huge demand in our work from health services and organisations at a time when it is harder to engage directly with BAME people as a really small organisation. We feel like there is almost a flood of desire to engage without understanding what the actual issues for BAME people are right now and of our capacity.*

Based on the overall responses obtained through our approach, four themes have emerged as to what an infrastructure body could offer:

1. Strong voice for the sector (e.g. giving visibility to the sector)
2. Training and leadership development to build strategic influences/alliances
3. Community engagement and dialogue
4. Campaigning and influencing.

More work needs to be done as to the role and function of regionally focused catalyst organisations as well as that of nationally recognised infrastructure organisation. It is our view that not only should we seek to establish a Black, Asian and minority ethnic national infrastructure support body, but there is the need to recognise and provide financial support to both catalyst and infrastructure organisations, to provide localised support and development capacity to micro and small organisations (e.g. local disbursement funding arrangements similar to the Comic Relief/NET, CCLORS and Phoenix Fund programmes). The recently published Kruger Report [15] talks about 'Community Improvement Districts'(CIDs) and 'Civil Society Improvement Agencies' (CSIA), both of which recognises a locality/regional approach to supporting civil society. Should the CSIA approach be adopted, 'left behind or invisible communities', could find themselves at the 'back of the queue' as they may not have the voice or influence to help shape discussion and action. This further highlights a challenge that many respondents alluded to in their interviews and one that the sector will need to heed by taking its head out of the sand, which serves to encourage what some may refer to as a "swift kick" to the rear! This would suggest that we need some interim development arrangement (s) in place; one which operates locally/regionally in providing some financial and capacity support opportunities to BAME micro and small organisations with income under £50k per annum along the lines indicated in Fig 18 above.

As we now find ourselves in the throes of a 'second wave' of the spread of the virus, the notion of returning to what may be termed 'normality' may be further away than many had predicted back in April when we first initiated our survey and engagement with Black, Asian and minority ethnic led organisations. Much has taken place since as indicated above, and the reviews and surveys we have so far undertaken clearly demonstrate the power of the 'voices' of communities and, as we indicated in another report, reflects well on "community-based consultation and research."[16] This should be encouraged and supported, especially as the majority of Black, Asian and minority ethnic led organisations are particularly small.

How we support them is going to be critical. We believe the emerging priorities around recognising the role and potential of catalyst organisations and the recognition of the need for a wider Black, Asian and minority ethnic infrastructure body to support and help develop the sector specifically will help going forward. Black, Asian and minority ethnic led catalyst and infrastructure organisations must take the lead in building and developing the sector by providing the needed spaces and platform upon which organisations can grow and thrive as services reshape to meet new approaches forced on us from the COVID pandemic.

[15] Kruger D (2020), Levelling up our communities: proposals for a new social covenant: A report for government by Danny Kruger MP; September 2020

[16] Nazroo et al (2020), Rapid Evidence Review: Inequalities in relation to COVID-19 and their effects on London; Greater London Assembly; September 2020 (https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/rapid-evidence-review-inequalities-in-relation-to-covid-19-and-their-effects-on-london)

The evidence is clear. The challenge engendered by the COVID -19 pandemic will be remembered as perhaps the most singular impetus that has brought about massive transformational changes over a short period of time (i.e. for bringing about remote, digital and hybrid working, learning and living experiences). Without a doubt, there are important aspects of our current system that should remain. Nevertheless, there are also new innovative and encompassing opportunities and developments that have emerged which will need building on, especially around community engagement and ways of working remotely and digitally.

[15] Kruger D (2020), Levelling up our communities: proposals for a new social covenant: A report for government by Danny Kruger MP; September 2020

[16] Nazroo et al (2020), Rapid Evidence Review: Inequalities in relation to COVID-19 and their effects on London; Greater London Assembly; September 2020 (https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/rapid-evidence-review-inequalities-in-relation-to-covid-19-and-their-effects-on-london)