

**Community Hubs in East Sussex – Collaborative potential or one-off emergency response?**

***A view from the East Sussex VCSE Alliance***

1. **Introduction**

Many of the Alliance members, along with other East Sussex VCSE organisations, have played an active role in helping set up, support and deliver activities as part of the five Covid-19 Community Hubs.

Representative from the Alliance have also been members of the Oversight Group to consider the future scope and role of the Community Hubs post August 2020.

The Alliance have had the opportunity to reflect on their own experiences of Community Hubs, as well as consideration of the Community Hubs draft Programme Brief; Sustainable Community Hubs.

The purpose of this paper is contribute to the work of the Oversight Group in relation to discussions and strategic planning on the future of Community Hubs in East Sussex as the COVID-19 pandemic crisis evolves.

1. **Alliance support for Community Hubs**

In principle, the Alliance supports the continuation of the Community Hubs initially through to March 2021. There is also widespread interest across public and voluntary agencies in exploring the potential role of Hubs in the longer term.

We agree that there have been some real benefits to the Community Hub approach:

* Success in rapidly developing partnership collaboration and linking to the upsurge of community and neighbourhood responses
* Hubs have mobilised many volunteers and accelerated integration and partnership working across public, voluntary and private agencies
* Ability for a level of consistency across East Sussex, but with local flexibility to meet specific community priorities and needs
* Clarity in having single access points to a wide range of statutory and voluntary services
* They have supported many vulnerable people in challenging circumstances and protected the NHS
* County-wide VCSE organisations have also linked their services into the Hubs
* VCSE partners able to offer additional support e.g. undertaking shielding calls
* Local businesses and the NHS have also been involved

That said,it should be acknowledged that the success of Hubs to date has been in dealing with a limited number of actions for a relatively small vulnerable population. Hubs also have not yet been the subject of any independent or objective evaluation involving members of the public.

1. **The future scope of Community Hubs in East Sussex**

This short paper attempts to describe what effective and inclusive Community Hubs might look like going forwards. Only a vision and plans that are truly inspirational will capture the imagination and energy of a whole community, which should be our aim.

**Key considerations in future models:**

* **Core offer**

We appreciate that different Hubs in each District and Borough area will choose their own priorities. However, there should be a ‘core offer’ for what each hub offers, what outcomes are being pursued and some co-ordination of Hub activity county-wide.

* **Vulnerability**

The current Hubs focus on supporting the most vulnerable people is expected to continue. However, the range of vulnerability is currently quite narrow and does not, for example, include young people.

* **Extending definition of vulnerability**

Looking ahead, Hubs have the potential to include integrated plans and actions that help a wider range of vulnerable people recover from the pandemic. This could include support for expected increases in mental health problems, social isolation, homelessness and unemployment.

* **Prevention and funding for preventative services**

There is also a partnership role in identifying and delivering coordinated preventative services, which seek to effectively mitigate the escalation of issues by early specialist interventions and addressing people’s needs holistically. For example, the provision of specialist welfare benefits advice to prevent indebtedness and address the wider determinants of health and wellbeing. There has been little focussed discussion yet of the need to include preventative and future cost saving actions and services, but these are essential to sustainability and the development of a holistic approach to addressing community needs.

* **Cross sector collaboration**

One of the most attractive and impressive features of Community Hubs is the way they have mobilised cross-sector support, collaboration and activity at a rapid pace. To build upon and sustain this way of working will need the commitment of all partners to support Hubs as their role evolves over time.

* **Addressing need holistically**

The prize is high, holistic and early interventions that not only generate better outcomes for people, but also reduce demand on more expensive and acute services.

Potential thematic headings for Community Hub activity going forwards are described below (6). They are illustrative and impact upon each other but cannot all be taken forward at the same pace without overloading partners and in some cases, without the allocation of specific resources.

* **Whole community issues**

The proposed unifying factor for Hubs is the commitment to support and grow the wellbeing of a whole community through a blend of economic, social and environmental actions.

* **Citizen engagement**

Planning for the future of Hubs needs to engage citizens at an early stage in co-designing solutions to vulnerability and the longer-term potential of Hub activity.

1. **Vision for Community Hubs**

* Integrated, holistic services that reduce vulnerability and enable the wellbeing of local communities
* Integration and funding of preventative services
* Systematic design and delivery of sustainable and evidenced solutions to local health and wellbeing needs
* Inclusive services that reduce inequalities

1. **Governance**

* Partnership based
* Transparent and open in all they do
* Generous Leadership including enabling the contribution of smaller and neighbourhood VCSE organisations

1. **Proposals of type of VCSE and Statutory services should be within Hub Scope**
2. **Planning for new COVID Spikes**

* Supporting Public Health plan in localities
* Rapid Mobilisation Plans (volunteers, environmental health, redeployment of resources)
* Calls to shielded and isolated individuals

1. **Information and Advice**

* Provision of services linked to evidenced need
* Referrals to most relevant services with capacity
* Signposting to alternatives
* Funding and provision of specialist support to address financial security including specialist debt, welfare benefits and housing support

1. **Health and Care**

* Integrated Health and Care implementation
* Mental Health parity with physical health
* Transformation of Community Mental Health services
* Prevention and early intervention focus
* Substance misuse
* Suicide prevention
* Safeguarding

1. **Enterprise and employment**

* Business advice and support
* Incubators
* Social Enterprise
* Employability support

1. **Environment**

* Food partnership activities
* Food security including access to emergency food AND longer term sustainability of affordable food sources
* Access to green, open and blue space and health
* Climate Change

1. **Equalities**

* Women
* BAME
* Disability

1. **Children & Young People**

* Early years
* Transition
* Youth

1. **Housing and Homelessness**

* Rough sleeping
* Homelessness
* Temporary Accommodation

The Alliance proposal is that as part of the development and scoping phase for future Community Hubs, the VCSE fully assists in the mapping or potential linked services, including considerations of how referrals into and out of Hubs could work.

In particular, consideration needs to be given to the inter-play between services that the VCSE is commissioned to deliver, as well as emerging new PCN level multi-disciplinary services (e.g. Emotional Wellbeing Services for mental health).

1. **Coordination of Hubs**

In theCommunity Hubs draft Programme Brief; Sustainable Community Hubs, we note that it mentioned VCSE Hubs as distinct from ESCC and D&Bs. It would be useful to have clarification as to how it is envisaged that this would work in practice for each Hub locality. The VCSE is willing to take on this role, but would need to be resourced as a new activity.

1. **Contextual considerations and issues**

**Subsidiarity**

Identifying which actions are best delivered at Hub level and which are better delivered at more local or county/Sussex level

**Critical Mass**

The scale of actions should be proportionate to evidenced need in individual Hub localities

**Investment**

ESCC have made a commitment to invest in Hubs but details are not yet available. There is also the prospect of NHS investment if Hubs can deliver against the objectives of the long-term plan, including prevention and early intervention.

Economic development and regeneration strategic Covid recovery plans will be addressing skills development, sustaining and initiating East Sussex business, jobs and growth. The links to health and well-being are noted in Team East Sussex recovery plan.

Hubs may also be a focal point to create robust proposals and assist in drawing down external investments for integrated partnership working.

The VCSE will need increased investment to enable them to sustain their key role in Hub developments, including the mobilisation and support of volunteers.

**Investment in preventative services**

Through working collaboratively the hubs can initiate and support cost savings through investment in prevention

**Austerity/Recession/Savings**

There will be a drive for financial savings from all sides as we come out of the pandemic but also increased opportunities to pool budgets and integrate services.

**Volunteering**

There is an opportunity for Hubs to be a key part of a rethink on how volunteers are recruited, supported and deployed following the magnificent volunteer response to COVID-19.

**For and on behalf of the East Sussex VCSE Alliance:**

**John Routledge**

Executive Director, East Sussex Community Voice (ESCV)

Chair of the East Sussex Voluntary, Community & Social Enterprise (VCSE) Alliance

**Penny Shimmin**

CEO SCDA

**Neil Blanchard**

CEO Southdown