

**The achievements, impact,
learning and legacy of a
Devon-wide alliance of
voluntary agencies funded
through the Covid Outbreak
Management Fund (COMF)**

**The
Background**

**The
Achievements**

**The
Challenges**

**The
Delivery**

**The
Impact**

**The
Learning**

**The
Legacy**

The Background

COMF was a UK government programme designed to support public health activity tackling COVID-19, working to break the chain of transmission and protect the most vulnerable.



Public Health Devon commissioned the Alliance to use existing relationships and capacity as a spring board for delivering services across the county against COMF objectives.

**COMF UK
prog**



Public

Devon
County Council



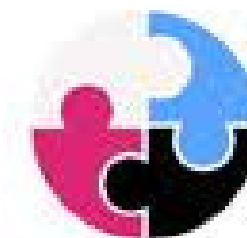
Health



Devon Alliance



The Alliance was a partnership of five voluntary sector organisations managed by DeVA*



Plymouth & Devon Racial Equality Council



(*Devon Voluntary Action)

The Alliance supported over 37,000 people across Devon...

The Achievements

Around 100 people secured over £325,000 in additional benefit payments

Rough sleepers accessed over 500 nights of emergency winter accommodation in Torridge

1100 people were supported through wellbeing calls, specialist victim support help, Covid related support for sight and hearing-impaired people.

33,900 people were supported to self-isolate through grant funded voluntary groups and social enterprises

Over 100 people were helped to use the internet through a network of 20 digital befrienders

93 people accessed a programme of free mental health counselling – support they would not have had if they were required to pay

Over 1000 ethnically diverse people were supported with Covid testing

220 ethnically diverse people who were impacted by racism relating to Covid were directly supported

100 families with young children were supported in Exeter

Funding

The Alliance received a COMF grant of just over £1 million and had to deliver its services in just six months – between October 2021 and March 2022.

“*The concept of relief funds is a good one – responsive, rapid way of getting money out to services delivering frontline support*”

- £226k DeVA – delivery
- £194k Small and large grants
- £186k DCT – delivery, grants and grant admin
- £103k Citizens Advice – delivery
- £86k Living Options Devon – direct delivery
- £78k Winter Pressures grants
- £44k Devon Mind – delivery
- £33k Intercom Trust – delivery
- £30k Evaluation
- £21k DeVA Programme Management
- £20k Young Devon – delivery
- £20k PDREC – delivery
- £14k HIKMAT– delivery

The Challenges

The Alliance faced some significant challenges:



Capacity

Did the partners have sufficient capacity to manage and deliver the programme in such a short time?



Deliver to greatest need

Could it reach the most vulnerable and isolated people – those in greatest need of support?



The right services

Did partners have the right mix of services for the right people?



Reach

Could the Alliance reach all parts of Devon – given that voluntary sector networks are stronger in some areas than others?



Balance

Could it get the right balance between light touch bureaucracy and ensuring the money was well spent?



Future

And what would happen after the six months?

The Alliance had a lot of flexibility to do what it felt was most appropriate for the people of Devon in line with overall COMF objectives.

The Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) provides funding to local authorities in England to help reduce the spread of coronavirus and support local public health.

And while this required a great deal of trust between Devon Public Health and the Alliance partners, it built on long standing relationships and mutual respect

“*The voluntary sector were closer to individuals and community groups and were able to understand need as the pandemic escalated. Working together as one allowed the support to get to where it was needed in a timely way without significant barriers*”

[Tina Henry, Public Health Devon]

Extra resources for fast track implementation of a new online hub helping people engage in social action

The Delivery

So what did the Alliance deliver in such a short time?

A series of social media campaigns to promote volunteering



**Funding for 78
community groups
with £300 grants
totalling £23,400**



Tumbly Hill Day Centre
Kingsbridge Recovery Library and Drop-in.

**Large grants for 9
organisations and
social enterprises
totalling £165,000**



A Digital Befriender Client

**Funding 9 projects
focussed on diversity
and equalities
communities totalling
£76k**



Chudleigh Against Racism (CAR)

Development support to 14 organisations and enterprises to build their capability and capacity

“ The most positive outcome of the project was that we have been able to engage with 31 young people who were in desperate need of community engagement” Pelican Project, Exeter

Commissioning 4 established equalities and diversity groups to deliver targeted support for key vulnerable groups

“ There are already clear signs that the children are increasing in confidence. This is especially marked in the girls who initially tended to sit back and watch the boys talk”
PDREC

Recruiting additional advice staff to meet increased demand for Citizens Advice help

“It was good to have someone to talk to because we were both feeling so awful and really struggling to think straight - so having someone to make suggestions for support was really useful”
Couple with Covid in Mid Devon

Providing free mental health counselling for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged

Helping isolated people become more digitally included and establish a network of befrienders

Running cross-sector workshops to raise awareness and understanding of health inequalities

Researching the role of community shops during the pandemic – providing evidence of their importance and recommendations for action.



The Impact

Overall the Alliance helped people:



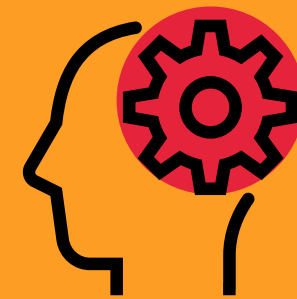
Improve their resilience



Reduce their sense of isolation and loneliness



Boost their confidence



Develop skills



Build community connections



Access services

The learning

The support given to individuals and groups was hugely important but what was the broader learning from the Alliance's work – for Devon and other areas?



A collaborative approach of this sort needs trust on all sides.



The commissioner, the lead partner and delivery partners need to accept some degree of risk for a programme with such a short set up and delivery timescale.



Good programme and grant management can be light touch where there is trust and real partnership.



Getting this amount of funding out quickly to where it is needed most needs to build on existing relationships and capacity.



Grant funding can be delivered effectively and efficiently by organisations with close links to their “own” communities, especially if they share information and cooperate.



Short application window can make it difficult to get grant applications from small groups and those less well connected – risk of being dominated by “usual suspects”

The learning

continues...



Local voluntary sector support organisations are key to reaching groups working with people and communities in need.



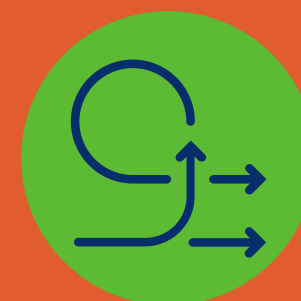
Reaching people with protected characteristics requires the full engagement of organisations and networks which know and understand these communities.



Participation in grant assessment panels gave valuable insight into the breadth and depth of the voluntary sector's work – especially enlightening for the public sector



It is crucial to have an experienced, connected and respected organisation “holding” the partnership



And it is important to have flexible, engaged and trusting commissioners and senior voluntary sector advocates in the “system”.

“

Sharing experiences with other practitioners in the Diversity, Equality and Inclusion (DEI) network was really valuable. There are strategic meetings, but they hadn't really worked in this very practical way before.....”

The Legacy

The Alliance project may have been very short term, but it has left a valuable legacy

- Strengthened relationships and trust between voluntary organisations
- A more confident and collaborative voluntary sector
- Greater public sector confidence in the voluntary sector's collective ability to deliver
- A foundation for active engagement with the Integrated Care System through the emerging VCSE Assembly
- A model of devolved, effective and efficient grant making involving live data sharing amongst delivery partners
- An agile model for rapidly deploying support and services for the most vulnerable people which can be used in future crises and emergencies.

The Legacy

continues...

- An online platform for connecting people to their community and promoting social action (Devon Connect).

- A greater recognition that voluntary sector infrastructure is important

- Further funding through COMF 2 will ensure we can build upon all that has been achieved

- There is now clear evidence of need and impact in key areas – such as free counselling, digital inclusion and how to support isolated diversity and equalities communities.

“ *The COMF project enabled our voluntary and community sector partners to do the things they do better than any other sector. They galvanised and coordinated community activity and social action at a street level that connected people and communities to make sure no one was missed* ”

[Darin Halifax Integrated Care System for Devon (ICSD)]

MORE INFORMATION

Find out more about the achievements and learning of the Alliance project from:



Citizens Advice Devon
<https://www.cabdevon.org.uk/>



Devon Communities Together
<https://www.devoncommunities.org.uk/>



Devon Voluntary Action
<http://www.devonva.org/>



Living Options Devon
<https://www.livingoptions.org/>



Young Devon
<https://www.youngdevon.org/>



Report by Clarity CIC
<https://www.claritycic.org/>