

APWG Chairs feedback

‘Loneliness & feelings of isolation in young people is on the rise. How can we work with communities to tackle this?’

Cllr Keith Flunder, APWG Chair



Introduction and format

This study was established to look at the following questions:-

- 1) Who are the lonely children/young people?
- 2) Where (and perhaps how) can these children and young people be 'found'?
- 3) What does loneliness/isolation mean to children and young people?
- 4) Why are some children/young people feeling lonely and isolated? (is it always a concern?)

An additional question added by the group was:-

- 5) How can communities help to address these issues for children and young people?

This study also looked at several reports , surveys and studies, for example, the government, the co-op, the lottery and other concerned groups.



Introduction and format (cont.)

- During the early stages of the project during members meetings, it was suggested that the group should look at two age groups. As it appeared there were considerable differences between children at school from year 4 up to year 11 and young people taking A levels and who were at college and university. It was later agreed that this approach was not as useful as first thought and although the workshops were roughly split along these general age group criteria. It was felt that the age difference related to the environment and experience and not necessarily the possible problems the children and young people were experiencing. In fact looking at the issues relating to all age groups did result in some of the reports recommendations.
- After the workshops on 6 January and the members meeting on 6 March, it was agreed that splitting the report into six sections was a useful way to report the recommendations back to the cabinet. These sections are:-
- A) Parents, B) Technology, C) Children and Young People (CYP), D) Schools, E) Local Authorities, and F) Communities
- Please note that in each of the following six sections, the groups have highlighted only a few of all the concerns and ideas raised, as it was generally felt that with such a 'large' subject area, that only a few issues could be recommended and possible actions be taken forward.
(Please see the full results and notes taken at the workshops as an addendum.)

A) Parents

The subjects of main concern, highest to lowest, were:-

- Parents working longer, with less time for their children.
- Parents are no longer solely 'in charge/control' of their children's social interactions, let alone being aware of what other children are doing.
(Awareness training?)
- Engage and 'teach' parents as early as possible inc. social media training
- Deprivation or not having enough money to help their children attend clubs and groups

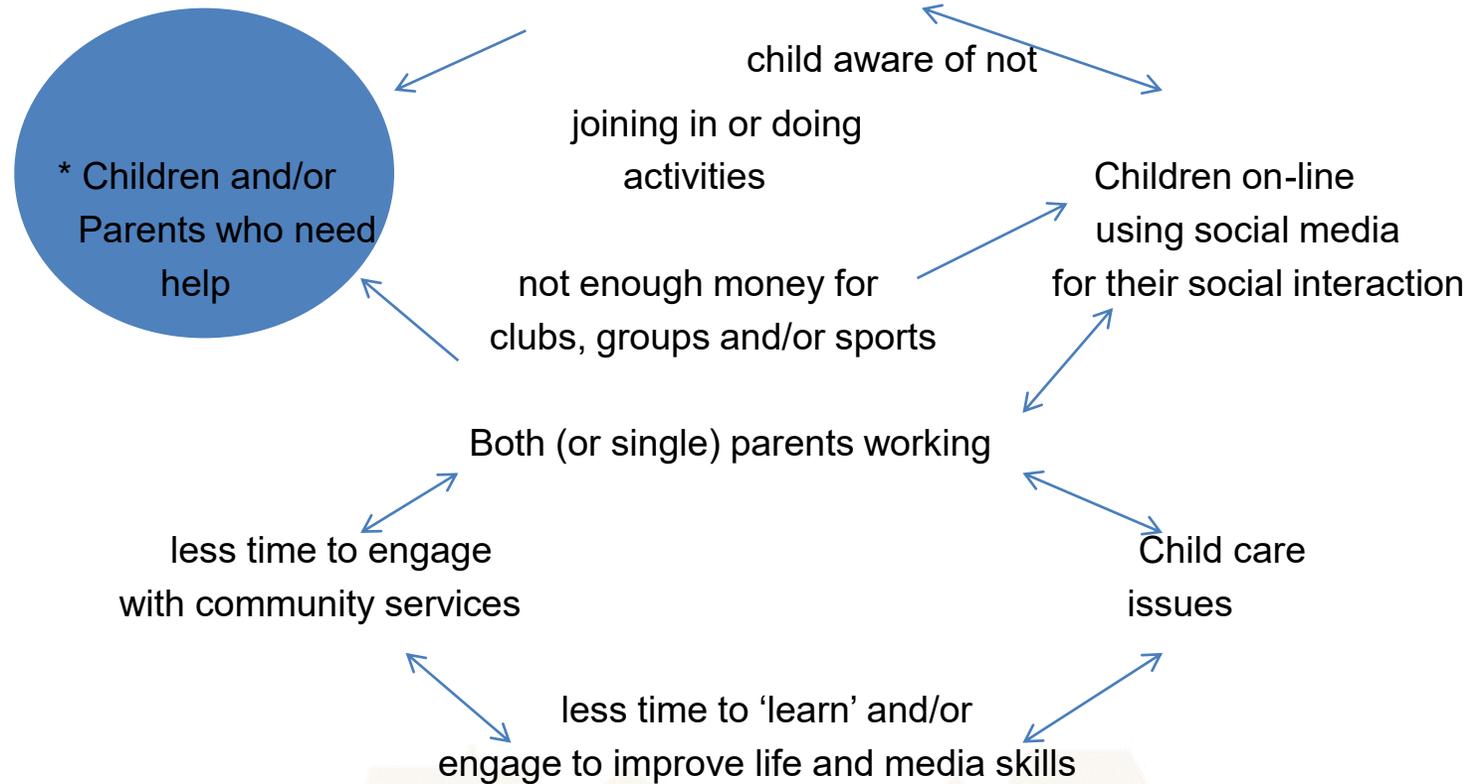
Plus barriers to reading and writing, life/parenting skills, cultural issues and lone parents.

Recommendations:-

1) To provide some additional parenting skills training either on-line (this could help with social media training need) and/or a short course. To include additional interaction with their local community, if possible.

2) To provide some reduced cost access to community groups and sports clubs. Perhaps this could be offered after parents complete the training suggested in 1)?

The parents 'Conundrum' or cycle



* We need to try and prevent CYP and their parents getting to the point of needing additional support and/or interventions.

B) Technology

The main area's of concern were:-

- Children become distracted / obsessed by on-line relationships and gaming options to the detriment of 'usual social interaction, conversation and activities'. This limits both parents and children's time for community engagement and can increase the negatives such as grooming opportunities.
- The increase in complexity of communication across different devices and systems does mean that CYP who may have a issue, are more difficult to 'find'.

A positive outcome from the groups conversations was:-

- It was also felt that groups who engage with on-line activities and social gaming do offer the chance for CYP to find/investigate pathways to sites that could help to improving their on-line and community engagement.

Get over or around the technology 'Wall'.
(breaking down barriers)

CYP bringing others
around, under
and over the 'wall'



Technology

Recommendations:-

3) To support strategies to help parents and CYP to engage with their communities (where ever they may be) and local activities together, through on-line activities and games. Working with the existing family strategy networks.

For example creating virtual 'Adventure play areas' with on-line activities linked to community and activity groups and sports clubs, possibly with exclusive (limited) 'play' area's for special interest groups and at risk groups. Some of these could lead to 'real' social and retrospective open evenings at county wide venues.

C) Children and young people

The main area's of concern are:-

- Children feeling that they are being left out is a worry for many children.
- CYP not being asked directly themselves about how they can be helped, this should be done on a continual basis.
- Health and other issues such as changes in environment and friendship groups, moving away, culture, caring for family members, reading and writing etc. can lead to CYP being isolated.
- Financial barriers can limit some CYP attending local groups and clubs.
- Older young people have less 'structure' in their environment and have more complex needs. They are also more difficult to reach/contact.
- Some CYP are worrying about issues, such as the environment etc., that they can't directly control, thus adding to their overall isolating issues.

Positive comments were:-

- Some CYP are self awareness and are able to help themselves and other younger children.
- Not all loneliness is bad/negative, some CYP need their own space while growing-up.

Recommendations:-

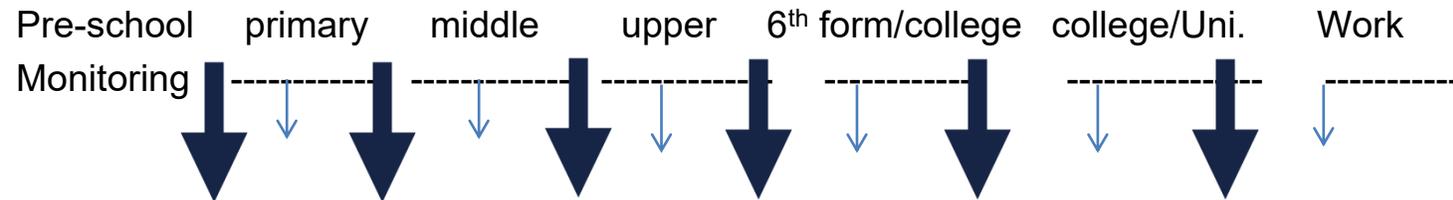
- 4) Create strategies to work with CYP within their communities, on-line, with local groups and clubs and with local councils (members) at all levels.
- 5) To support those CYP who want to grow and create their own community groups and clubs.
- 6) To measure and monitor future strategies, perhaps by measuring happiness of CPY in Staffordshire.

D) Schools and College's

The main area's of concern are:-

- The increase in stress when going through transitions between schools, sets and friendship groups.
- To improve social and community activities both during and after school.
- To use pupil premium funding more imaginatively and constructively.
- To improve PSHEE to include more awareness of loneliness/isolation and highlight the hazards and benefits of on-line activities and relationships. Including more honesty about the challenges through school and beyond.
- Sharing information about some pupils needs to be improved.

Education Stress Gaps (CYP life gaps) :-



Gaps both between age based establishments during education and the school holidays. We all need to work on 'filling' these gaps and/or catching those who 'fall through the gaps'.

Recommendations:-

- 7) To support strategies that can reduce stress for CYP, when transitions happen during school, college and University. Work with local councils and community groups.
- 8) Create a better link between local communities and their schools. Perhaps by reducing the hire costs for community groups and publish what each school might be able to offer.

E) Authorities

The main concerns are :-

- Not to overstretch what the County Council can do, have a gradual and staged approach to improve support for CYP. Aim for what's achievable.
- Could do better by sharing more information between councils and their communities, improving transport links and promoting what is available in each community .
- To talk to CYP on an on-going basis. This will help in evaluating what strategies make a difference over the coming years.
- There are currently no 'additional' benefits to the community leaders and club/group organisers. So looking at possible 'benefits' for volunteers and their communities (i.e. turning isolation into aspiration)
- At risk groups need to be identified and then resources targeted. (i.e. similar to place based approach.)

Positive comments:-

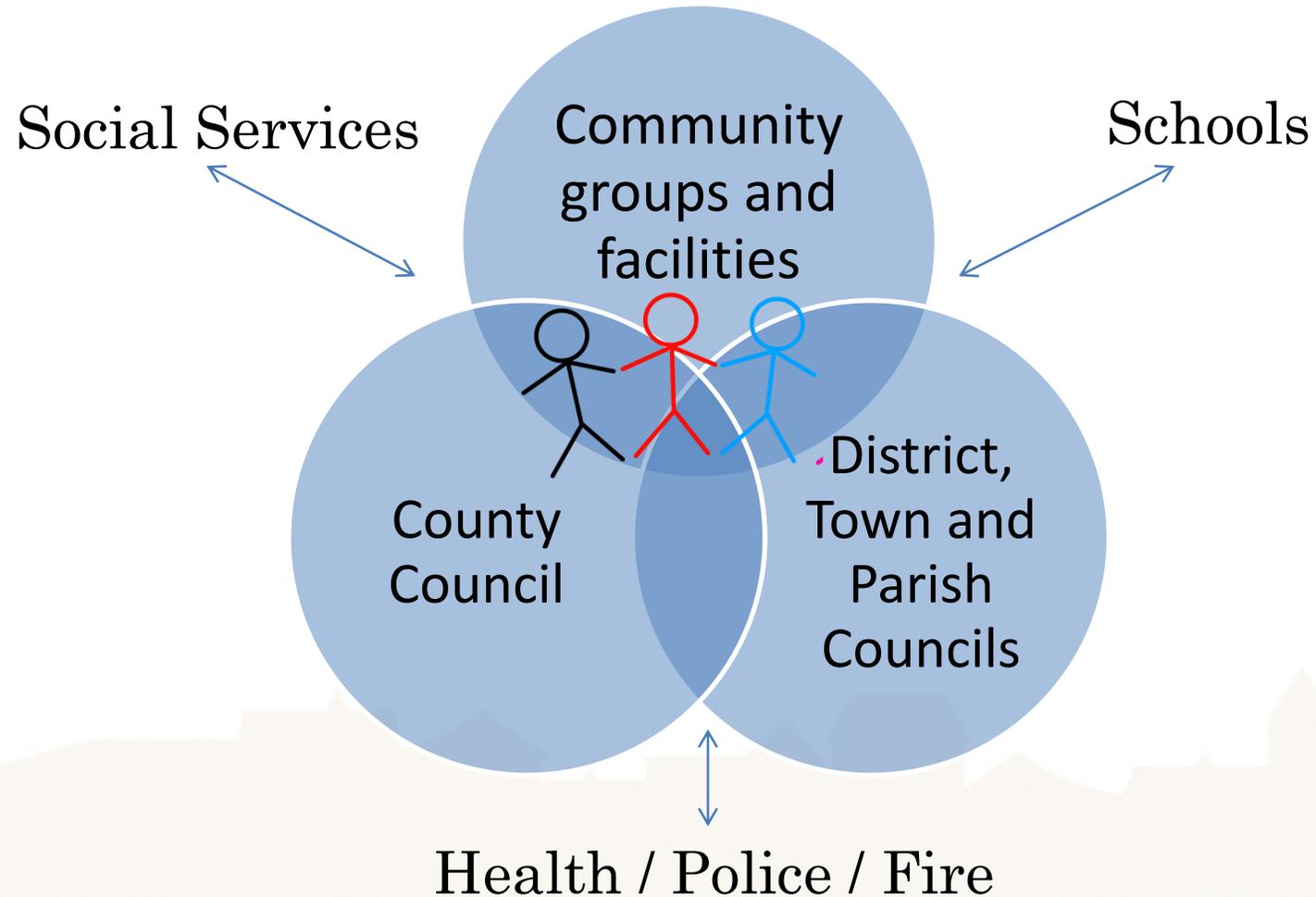
- It was confirmed that intergenerational activities are a good way of reducing loneliness for both the young and the old.
- The idea to promote a bring a friend campaign or better still bring a new friend, to community groups or sports club etc. was felt to be good idea to expand the activity levels for CYP, while supporting their communities.

Recommendations :-

- 9) To promote what is available in all the communities across the county and work with other levels of local democratic government. (County, District, Town, Parish, Village Halls, schools and community groups)
- 10) To look at what additional 'benefits' volunteers might want and need over the coming years. e.g. training, qualifications and awards for the voluntary sector. Suggest some of those who took part in the workshop could assist with this (if agreed).

Communities working together

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F) Communities people helping their communities

The main concerns are:-

- The need to build a sense of community, with local authority assistance. CYP want and need places to go to.
- Need to ensure that there are local venues, such as libraries and church centres and also community groups available, that welcome CYP. Activities to include different cultures as required.
- Not all local activities for CYP are being promoted and advertised across the whole community.

Some positive comments:-

- Taster sessions at sports clubs and social activity groups (perhaps using a buddying system suggested earlier) do work well in general.
- Mentoring (possibly provided by older YP) was mentioned as a good method to help some CYP to enlarge their local social interactions.

Recommendations:-

11) To ensure that all communities list and promote activities, clubs and groups in their local area. (This could include a measurement of the number of people accessing the activities, which could then be used for monitoring purposes?)

12) To look at promoting mentoring opportunities across communities and divisions for all ages. This could include some initial training opportunities for OYP to provide options for younger children?

13) To see if schools, colleges and universities could get more involved with their local communities and support activities for CYP.

Community Welcome

*Welcome to all – school / village or Town hall / library / church
Recreation area / pubs etc.*



Older Young People

Comments, concerns and recommendations:-

- Social and on-line bullying and manipulation was discussed, but it was agreed that this topic was too large to recommend any conclusions within this APWG project.

Recommendation:-

14) To look at how to ensure that all year 12 and older young people can improve their life skills, including issues around loneliness and isolation. This should also include citizenship, community activities and interactions, mental wellbeing, mentoring and even cooking and other life skills. All to improve their own resilience while helping local communities. This could be delivered with help from schools, colleges and Universities.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Although his project has been taken over by the lockdown due to Covid-19. It could be useful to look at some of the recommendations listed in the previous sections and the groups below to help, as and when services both from the County Council and within the communities return to 'normality'.

It could be the case that without the community and neighbourhood networks the situation could have been worse, during the lockdown period(s).

Recommendations:-

Looking at the 14) recommendations, from the previous sections, resulting from the analysis of the members and officer preferences, the following can be possibly linked as over riding recommendations.

Group I could include 1),7),9),11) and 12)

To promote and communicate complete lists of what is available in each community (division?) across all groups, charities and authorities involved. This could might be done through additional parent and CYP training and to include mentoring and community interaction opportunities across all ages.

Group II 2), 3),4),5),8),10),13) and 14)

This group can be linked to group I. To create on-line 'activities' (eg. retro gaming site) to engage CYP, OYP and parents and link them to reduced cost community activities / taster sessions (perhaps this could include some basic parent awareness /safety tick list or short questionnaire?). Educational institutions could provide an element of support and highlight their support for volunteer training courses, linked to their local communities and possibly their own needs.

6) In addition to the two suggested groups above, some monitoring process could be established perhaps with the assistance of the suggested on-line engagement? We also need to ask CYP what support they want.

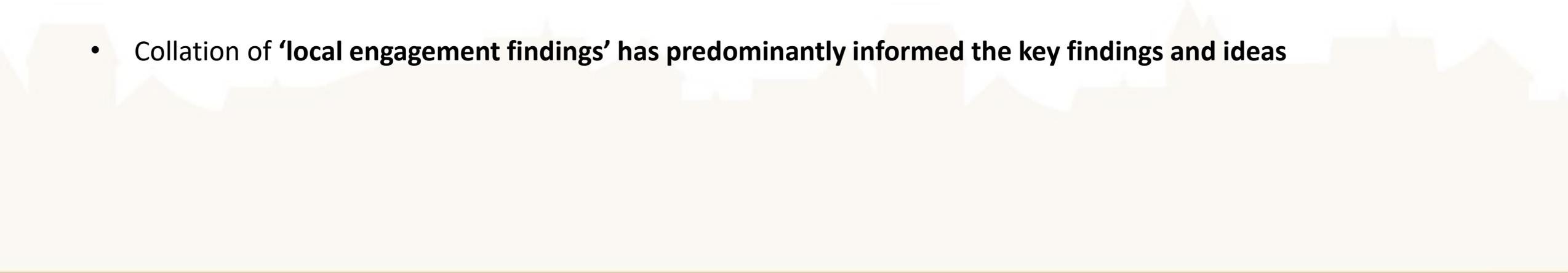
All Party Working Group:

How can we build on the surge in volunteering and social action, specifically to drive Place Based Approach and Supportive Communities further? *Such as mobilisation of 'Community Help Points' and to accelerate volunteering through 'Do It Staffordshire'.*

Cllr Keith Flunder, APWG Chair



APWG overall Approach

- **4 APWG Members sessions** – and wider **engagement with lead Cabinet Members and CCSMs**
 - Key officer input around **strategic direction and key linked ‘Communities’ work**
 - **Strategic partner and officers input** – including Support Staffordshire and SCVYS
 - Key **opportunities and issues initially explored with MPFT**
 - **APWG Members local engagement ‘interviews’ and insight** - community and neighbourhood groups
 - Collation of **‘local engagement findings’ has predominantly informed the key findings and ideas**
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A Brief Overview of the reaction of Staffordshire's communities to the Covid-19 Pandemic

Positive Community reactions:

- **Formation** of new community and neighbourhood groups.
- **Expansion of Services** both in terms of scope and the area being covered.
- **Better Communications** through the use of virtual meetings and phone buddying etc.
- **Closer Links** to many service providers such as local authorities and local health service providers.
- **Stronger Volunteer Groups** with many new younger volunteers coming forward
- **Greater Support** from local business's and local authorities (SCC) for example food banks....

Negative Community reactions:

- **Closed community venues and services**, most community venues have been and still are closed except those delivering SCC emergency services.
- **Reduced volunteer confidence** in general, with some older volunteers being concerned about their own and others safety, for example
- **Less volunteers coming forward** during the 2nd lockdown.
- **Concern over suicide** and mental health services in one area

Please see the full explanation of these summary reactions to the Covid-19 pandemic on the addendum to this study including services provided

Overall there were far more positive responses regarding the community reaction to the pandemic rather than the negative responses. We believe there are opportunities for SCC and other service providers to build on this positive view of local volunteers, service providers and councillors to create future services and plans across the County.

Summary of issues that restricted some community services from being provided during the pandemic

A selection of some issues noted :-

- Some residents and volunteers didn't have access to the internet.
- Some larger community groups didn't have access to venue/locations to be able to operate from and therefore had no suitable storage capacity or a coordination / activity hubs.
- Many older volunteers both new and existing were seen as being in the at risk groups, although many still worked and provided support to others from home, however they were still anxious.
- In the 'parished' districts across the county, Parish Councils were and still are at the forefront in providing support for volunteers and neighbourhood groups.
- More stability and support is needed in the non-'parished' districts
- Some religious based groups have limited the coverage of some of their services, to just the members of the Church.

A few examples of some unusual services provided by C & NG's:-

- Collecting sample bottles from isolating people, NHS bio-hazard.
- First Responders walking their local neighbourhoods looking for red cards in windows.
- Overall the voluntary groups interviewed had about 1,200 members, they helped about 4 -5,000 residents and undertook about 18 -20,000 actions.



Assessment of the future needs of Community & Neighbourhood groups

Volunteers, how to keep and motivate them:-

- **Digital:** Some volunteers need support to be more confident regarding IT skills over the coming weeks/months. This could motivate them to increase their skills, while understanding all the authorities on-line services and supporting residents.
- **Training:** The efficient training of volunteers should include safeguarding, safely opening venues, GDPR, driving and insurance etc. This constructive and imaginative training should reduce local anxieties and motivate volunteers to keep on improving their community skills.
- **Resilience:** As the 2nd lockdown ends and we enter Tier 3 the teaching of local communities about isolation and loneliness will help to build resilience and help all our volunteers to recognise when local residents need help.

Working with volunteers and providing the right support is critical to build on this years surge in volunteers.

Opening community venues, facilities and services:-

- **Re-opening our communities:** Many if not most of our community venues and facilities are still closed. Perhaps SCC can further help in providing advice, best practise and create plans with members, for their local groups and facilities. Thus supporting the needs of the current and future volunteers.
- **Working Together:** To continue and further support the closer links with a larger range of service providers. Additional links through virtual meetings initially could help to support the better working links between the current emergency hubs / groups and providers such as social services, family services, libraries and the NHS.....
- **Infrastructure and building flexibility:** Improving the shortage of community venues and facilities such as training & storage rooms, IT access facilities and local covid-19 test locations, would increase community resilience and build better **Community Help Points**.



Issues and some options expressed during interviews

- **Stronger links:** Some development of links to social services, family services, unemployment and redundancy services, drug and substance abuse facilities and financial advice services etc. primarily for signposting purposes. However in some locations job clubs, advice interviews and access to meeting rooms would be useful, with reciprocal recognition of the skills that volunteers can bring into the services mix. This was also discussed as one way of providing projects to keep volunteers interested in improving their services and skills in their local communities. Perhaps additional links to the existing family improvement boards could be considered?
- **Paying overheads and rules:** For some community service providers this has reduced their ability to support and coordinate the volunteers networks that would have provided more sustainable neighbourhood coverage, while demand for their services has increased 10 fold. Also some service contracts restricted the use of volunteers, due to training needs, safeguarding rules, insurance issues and regulations.
- **Parish Councils:** Some parish councils were insular and resisted getting involved' i.e. not their job to lead, so some attitudes and approaches still need to be changed. However over all it as felt that the districts with PC's did provide a better base for community groups and increased the long term stability i.e. all your eggs should not be in one basket. A possible idea is to try and establish voluntary and neighbourhood working groups in all Parish areas and something similar in 2 Tier Districts.
- **Church Hall and religious facilities:** comments have been noted that some religious authorities have been risk adverse, due to age of their parishioners, so the first step could just be arranging some 'afternoon teas' for members of help groups and residents. The integration of church based facilities and voluntary groups is essential for many communities.
- **Local is best:** Comments were made about the national volunteers programme, which distracted and annoyed some volunteers. Increasing the volunteers skills and the number of links between all service providers, will maximise flexibility and strengthen voluntary community services. **Working Together**

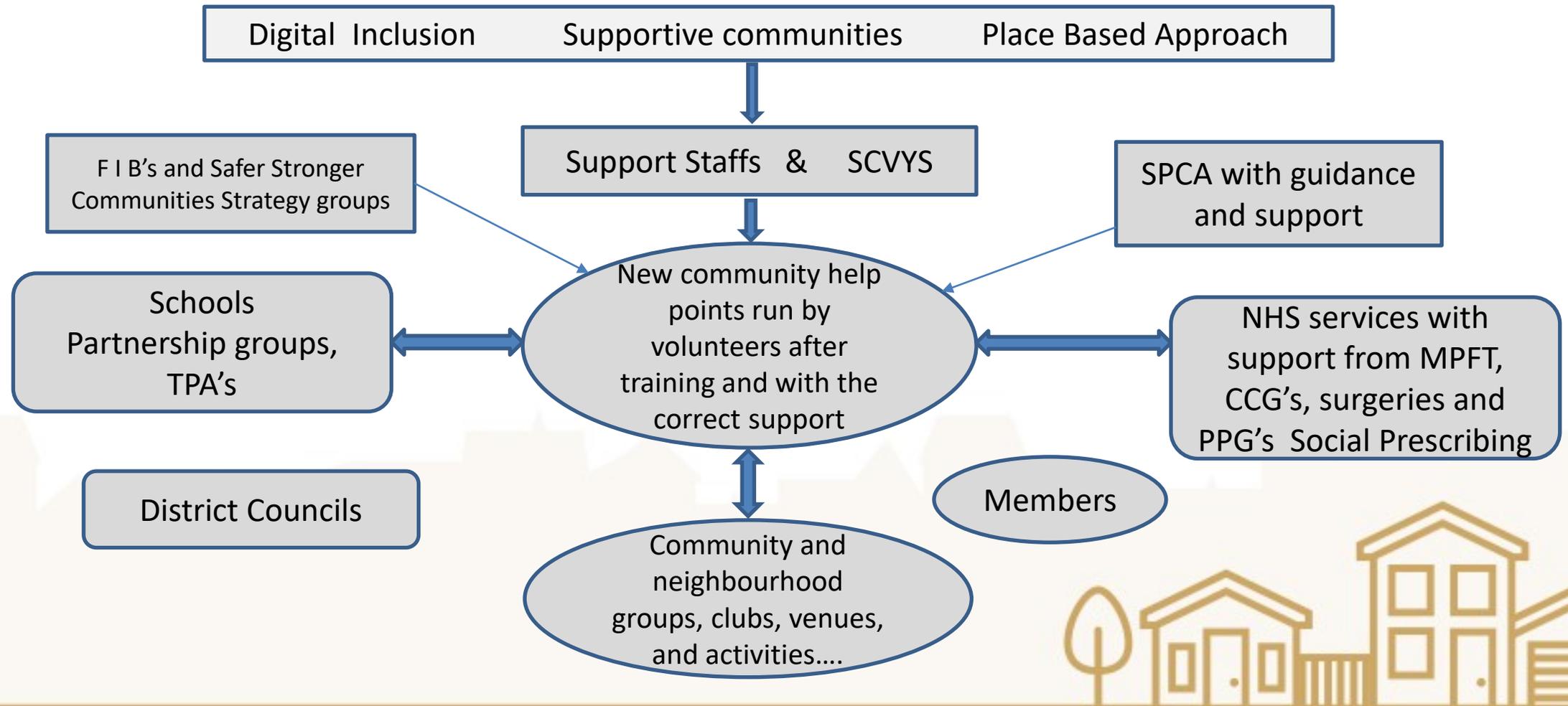


Additional ideas, suggestions and recommendations

- **Future digital support in our communities:** The use of on-line video conferencing apps for member surgeries with virtual chat rooms has already been asked for, i.e. tea with a smile. Other uses include IT and social media training to on-line gaming for youth clubs and links to Community Help Points.
 - **Buddying up with Schools:** To investigate if schools could support local groups to link to older residents for some children to work with them to perhaps provide history and other subjects, while the resident learns IT skills and reduce loneliness. Access to the right equipment might be an issue?
 - **Community Health and Help Points:** These locations will need the support of local authorities at all levels and the support of C & N groups, including churches and other community service providers, to maximise the number of volunteers as possible at each location. This will build on the work and social capital, that has been built up over this difficult year, more support with less bureaucracy.
 - **Improving locally based community services and communication links:** The continuing improvement of communication links between SCC, District and Parish Councils, with the support of Support Staffs and SCVYS and now links to health centres and surgeries, church groups, the new neighbourhood groups, schools, PCSO's and many other services is essential to support new initiatives. For example providing isolation and loneliness awareness training through Parish Councils.
 - **Expansion of community services and reach:** Many groups are looking to the future and hoping to provide additional services such as Stay and Play mornings for Dads with young children, knowledge of rehab services, coffee mornings for the unemployed etc.
 - **An Informal guide for providing community services:** It has been suggested that a guide is produced linked to any training to include issues such as how to look after money for clients, reduce fake news, understand regulations etc so volunteers can provide more navigation, rather than just signposting.
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A diagram showing the combining of some of work streams and partners to continue supporting our communities

SCC work streams supporting the development of community services



Conclusions for the medium term and working with the MPFT across Staffordshire

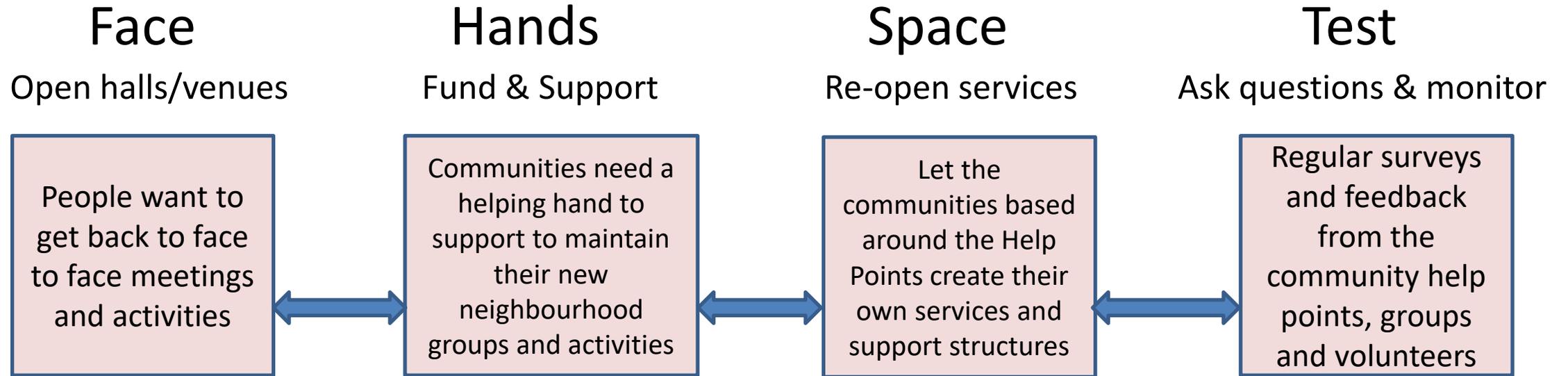
As part of this study, meetings have been arranged with the Midlands Partnership Foundation Trust and as a result of these meetings 5 options have been put forward to be considered by Johnny McMahon, Victoria Wilson, officers and the Cabinet. These are:-

- 1) To look at how **social prescribing** based at medical centres and doctors surgeries can be more fully integrated into the Community Help Points project and possibly allow direct links to community groups
- 2) To look at the best way of using and supporting **Staffordshire Connects** as the main community services database in Staffordshire.
- 3) To work collaboratively to try and **reduce the isolation and loneliness** of patients and residents with social care needs, while improving the mental health of everyone in our communities.
- 4) To look at establishing a database or access to a database that allows community groups to know when patients are going to need support, when they leave care and hospitals. **Supporting patients in the community.**
- 5) To provide and or support **the training of voluntary community based carers.**

Overall the building of long term Social Capital now needs to be brought forward from the short term neighbourhood response and current community resilience we have seen to date, bringing as many volunteers and residents with us, as possible.



Flow Chart of the possible next stages during the recovery and renewal stages



Members Community Fund: Due to election restrictions the successful members community fund will not be available during probably the most important time, while communities are going to need support to re-open and renew and even possibly expand and improve their community services. Perhaps an external independent organisation could still provide some additional support between January and May ?



Conclusions including immediate recommendations for reducing loneliness

The speed at which attitudes changed around community involvement and the support or providing community services through local volunteers was remarkable. It is felt that if correctly supported, following these conclusions and other work streams. Relatively small amounts of funding can motivate our communities and will release significant potential, over the coming years.

- **Working together**, to provide support to re-open community venues, clubs, café's and facilities across Staffordshire. Building on the PHP, Doing Our Bit approach... Working with our Communities?
- **Build flexibility** into communities and community services to increase resilience, working more closely with members and other service providers and get ready for when restrictions are lifted.
- **Provide on-line training** for volunteers, as quickly as possible, to widen the skills of volunteers (with members and councillors), including IT knowledge. This may even bring back some of the 'new' volunteers from earlier in the year to help with any new local projects. This should help in providing Navigating skills and not just Signposting awareness.
- **Open Community Help (and Health) Points** with the support local communities, parish councils, community and neighbourhood groups and 'key' volunteers to meet current and future local needs
- **Continue to build on the improved communications and links** with both SCC and other authority, voluntary and local service providers and organisations. Including the district councils and the CCSM's.

Members would like to note that funds from the Covid-19 recovery funds before Christmas along with support from local businesses and community groups has provided hot meals, food parcels, cards and games across the county over the Christmas period.

