PLANNING AND PREPARING FOR FUTURE CHANGES IN DEMAND

Help through Crisis learning paper

August 2020

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About the Help through Crisis programme

Help through Crisis (HtC) is a £33 million National Lottery funded programme set up by The National Lottery Community Fund, the largest funder of community activity in the UK. HtC supports 69 partnerships across England which help people who are experiencing or at risk of hardship crisis to overcome the difficulties they are facing to plan for their futures. The partnerships receiving National Lottery funding through the HtC programme bring together local small voluntary groups and established charities. Working together, they offer people advice, advocacy and support which matches their personal circumstances. The aim is to look at the issues people face, and the underlying causes, from their basic needs, to their physical and mental health, to skills and employment. People are supported to draw on their personal experiences to build on their skills and strengths so they are ready to seize the opportunities and challenges ahead.

About the Learning, Support and Evaluation team

The HtC, Learning, Support and Evaluation (LSE) team is a consortium of organisations commissioned by The National Lottery Community Fund to help build understanding and capture learning from the HtC programme. The team is made up of people from Ipsos MORI (Lead Contractor), Revolving Doors Agency and Hopkins Van Mil. The role of the consortium is to work with the 69 partnerships involved in the programme to:

- Empower them to evaluate and measure their impact, and capture learning about what works in tackling hardship crisis.
- Support their co-production activities, ensuring the people they support have a voice in shaping local services.
- Identify good practice and disseminate learning to build the evidence base and help partnerships to replicate or scale up approaches from elsewhere.

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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought huge uncertainty to HtC partnerships, as it has for individuals and organisations across the world. HtC partnerships have redesigned how they support people in crisis, working rapidly to adapt delivery models, look after their staff and continue to work in partnership with local organisations to enable person-centred support. This has taken significant work, and partnerships should be proud of what they have achieved in the Spring and Summer of 2020.

However, the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic are still developing, and there is significant uncertainty about what is going to happen later in the year. Although this uncertainty can make it difficult to plan for the future, it is important to continue thinking about what might happen as a way of supporting the planning process. One way to do this is to think about different future scenarios. As restrictions ease, the weeks ahead provide a window of opportunity to put measures in place that enable HtC partnerships to continue to support people in crisis.

This learning paper has been designed to support the planning process and help HtC partnerships think about how to respond to future changes.

1. Section 1 provides an overview of **the impact of COVID-19 on HtC partnerships** and the people they work with. It also includes some reflection questions to help look back at what partnerships have achieved in response to COVID-19.

2. Section 2 builds on this to outline some potential future scenarios and tools to help to **think about the future.**

3. We have also included some resources in the **appendix** on risk management.

This learning paper draws on insights from interviews with staff leading HtC partnerships, conducted between 3rd July and 24th July 2020. We have also built on wider resources and included links to further reading where relevant.

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LOOKING BACK ON HTC DURING LOCKDOWN

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THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON PROJECT DELIVERY

At the early stages of the pandemic, HtC partnerships worked rapidly to confront the challenges presented by COVID-19 and adapt to significantly changed circumstances. Partnerships have had to continue to rethink how they deliver services over recent months, often with little time to plan.

Although some partnerships have continued to operate face to face with social distancing measures, many have moved their services online or are providing support over the telephone. With just a year left of the HtC programme before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, partnerships had well-established ways of delivering support, strong referral pathways and local connections. COVID-19 and the subsequent changes to project delivery have therefore caused significant upheaval for HtC partnerships.

> **The main impact of COVID-19 is not being able to see the clients face-to-face."**
>
> Lead partner staff

HtC models of support

Person-centred, holistic support

- Advice/case worker
- Targeted services
- Community centres
- Drop-in centres

Impact of COVID-19 on delivery models

Advice and case work has moved online or onto the phone.

Other forms of support such as group activities have paused and physical centres have closed, preventing a "drop-in" model.

The Emerging Findings learning paper includes a description of different models of support used in the HtC programme.

> **We're used to helping people and we know people are suffering... and that burden of knowing you can't help people, you are not able to do it quick enough. It was quite frustrating."**
>
> Lead partner staff

COVID-19 has presented other challenges, aside from the move to remote working and support. Some projects have found partnership working more difficult during the pandemic. For example, they described problems reaching partners and other services, with no responses to phone calls and emails. The speed of changes have also made co-production activities more challenging for some. Many partnerships have been unsure how to translate their co-production activities online, with most previously having relied on face to face groups as a way of involving people who use their services.

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON DEMAND

As well as adapting project delivery, the pandemic has led to changes in demand for crisis support services.

Some HtC partnerships have seen **a rise in the number of people seeking support**. Partnerships attribute this to the pressures and stresses the lockdown has placed on people, resulting in a rise for support related to mental health, employment, domestic violence and family conflict.

Linked to this, some partnerships have also seen an increase in people with more complex support needs, for example people facing mental health and financial crises at the same time. For some, there has been a rise in support requests from people who have never accessed support before.

> **The mental wellbeing of young people has been affected so counselling requests have gone through the roof."**
>
> Lead partner staff

Other partnerships have seen **more complex changes in demand for their services**, including among people they had previously worked with. Partnerships attribute this to government measures designed to protect people from the impacts of lockdown. This includes:

- The furlough scheme which has protected the income of those unable to work due to the lockdown

- The Government's 'Everyone In' rough sleeping scheme and a ban on evictions which has reduced the number of people at risk of homelessness

- Changes to Universal Credit such as suspending sanctions

- A ban on bailiffs which has eased financial pressures and led to fewer issues with debt

Partnerships also described an increase in the amount of voluntary support available, for example through a rise in mutual aid groups and changes in the access criteria for foodbanks. These changes may mean some people, who may otherwise access HtC partnerships, are receiving support elsewhere.

> **There was an initial dip [in demand]. Then there has been a slow and steady rise."**
>
> Lead partner staff

Some HtC partnerships have taken steps to increase the visibility of their work – for example, putting up posters in foodbanks and adding information to local newsletters as a way of making sure those who need support know how to access their services. Others said they were relying on people who needed support getting in touch via social media, over email, or over the phone.

PARTNERSHIPS ARE OPERATING IN SIGNIFICANT UNCERTAINTY

The local and national context for HtC partnerships is constantly changing. There is a huge amount of uncertainty about how the situation may change over the coming months. In particular, there is a lack of clarity about:

Government schemes	**Further lockdown measures**	**Future funding opportunities**
When schemes will end or change in terms of who can access support and how they do so. This could impact on demand for crisis support.	Whether localised or national lockdowns will take place. Rules on social distancing and wider restrictions could impact the ability of services to continue as normal.	Whether projects will secure additional funding and how services may need to be adapted for future support needs.

There is concern among HtC partnerships about a surge in the number of people needing crisis support, particularly as government schemes are phased out. HtC partnerships worry about these schemes coming to an end without alternative measures being put in place to support people. They think this could lead to increased strain on household finances and an increase in demand for crisis support. However, there is uncertainty about whether a surge in demand for HtC partnerships will occur, or when it might happen.

This uncertainty has made it difficult for partnerships to anticipate future demand and plan for the coming months. Despite these challenges, the current uncertainties reinforce the importance of planning for the weeks and months ahead.

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> **What we learnt in the beginning of the pandemic is having no framework, having no idea what's going to happen and not being able to plan for it initially, is what causes the most distress [to staff]."**
> Lead partner staff

> **We are worried about a 'surge' of requests for support because of pent up demand. Landlords and bailiffs wanting to chase up."**
> Lead partner staff

> **It is really hard to plan! You only need a week to think about it and something has changed."**
> Lead partner staff

REFLECTING AND LOOKING BACK

Before planning for the future, it can be useful to reflect on how a partnership has adapted to meet the needs of both people facing crisis and support staff. This will help identify what has been done differently, and how well the changes have worked. Below are some questions which HtC partnerships can use to reflect on what they have done so far to adjust to changing circumstances resulting from the pandemic.

Reflection questions

Changes so far

- How has the way you work changed?

- How have staff been impacted?

- What has worked so far about the way your organisation has adapted to the changing situation?

Challenges

- What has helped you to act quickly to implement changes and overcome these challenges?

Benefits

- How can you continue these benefits as things potentially return to normal?

Case study template

The case study template includes key reflection questions and a structure for looking back at what a HtC partnership has achieved and the challenges which have been overcome in recent months. If you would like to share a case study with the LSE team, please sent it to: HelpthroughCrisis@ipsos.com

Further resources

The Children's Society (2020) has written about how they are capturing learning during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Collaborate (2020) has also developed a tool for capturing insights which includes further reflection questions, including:

- How are you coordinating learning efforts to make it easier for others to gather and share insights ?

- What information would be useful for you to collect as an organisation?

- How will you act on any learnings?

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THINKING ABOUT THE FUTURE

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HOW TO THINK ABOUT THE FUTURE

Predictions about the future can be wrong – there are always a huge number of unknowns and some events are not possible to foresee. Taking time to think about the future is not about being *right* but about being *prepared* by thinking about different possible scenarios. Partnerships can consider what they need to put in place to maximise opportunities and manage risks for their projects.

Thinking about the future is a challenging but important way to prepare for what happens next, particularly at a time when those working in crisis support have had to cope with huge upheavals in their personal and professional lives.

This learning paper sets out three scenarios for different types of COVID-19 restrictions and responses in future, which at the time of writing reflect the main COVID-19 responses. This includes measures like social distancing, advice to stay at home where possible, advice on staff going back to offices, and what might happen to government schemes designed to protect people from the impacts of the pandemic. These scenarios are all possible and overlapping; the future could include elements of each of them. In this way, they have been designed to provide a framework to help HtC partnerships think about what *could* happen, and how to respond amid the current uncertainty.

Tools for scenario planning

This section includes several tools to support partnerships to think about the future:

- A description of the three possible scenarios

- A template which can be used to think through what each scenario might mean for a specific HtC partnership. We have provided some questions as a starting point, focusing on the impacts for:

People in crisis	Project teams and partnerships	What this might require for project delivery

- This is followed by suggestions on what the impacts *could* be for each theme. These are simply ideas to help readers think about some of the different impacts and consider which are most likely or relevant for a HtC partnership. Some of the ideas suggested for each scenario may happen, but others will not, or not in the way they have been described here.

- The appendix includes further tools to think about how to manage different risks.

THREE POSSIBLE SCENARIOS

What happens later in the year and into 2021 may include elements of all three scenarios described below. Thinking through what some of the impacts might be can help to prepare HtC partnerships to respond to changing circumstances. The following pages describe some of the potential impacts each scenario might have – these are just ideas and each partnership will have other suggestions that reflect their specific context.
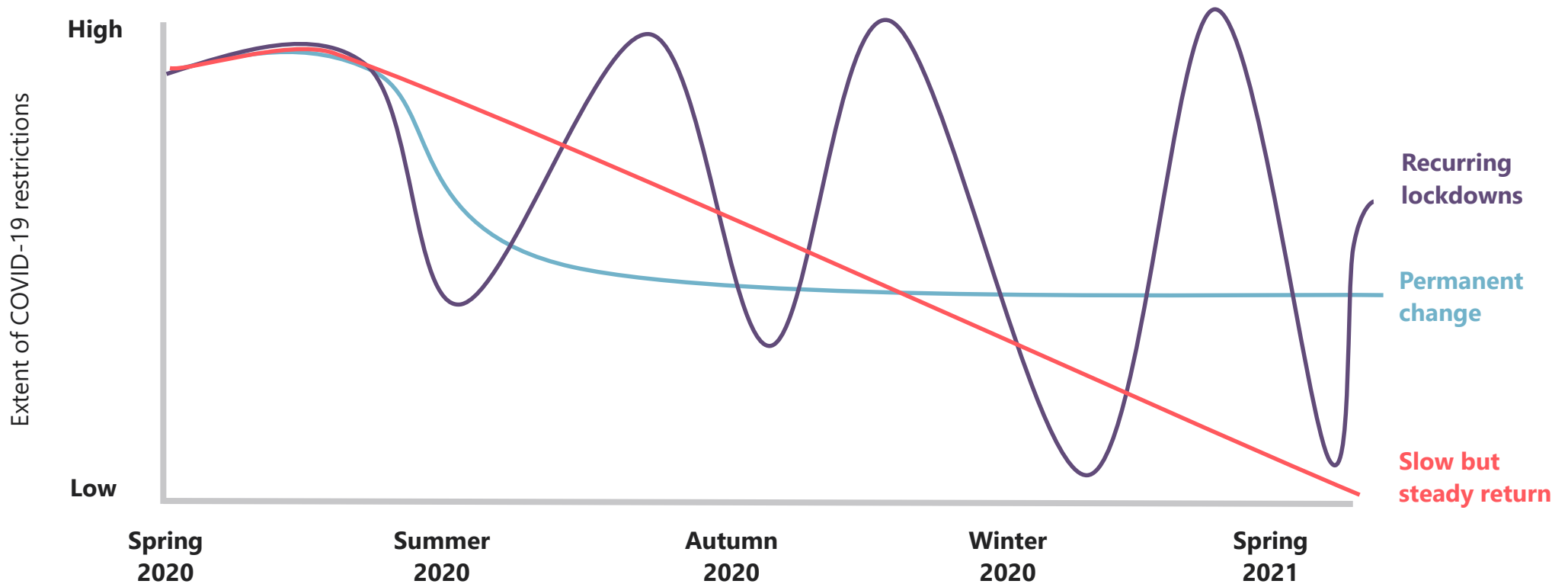
Recurring lockdowns: requirements to stay at home and socially distance are repeatedly introduced and relaxed across England or locally. This could have a significant (and unpredictable) impact on individual health and wellbeing, employment levels, and public services.

Permanent change: although lockdown measures are relaxed, some aspects such as social distancing or wearing masks remain in place. Individuals, communities and the economy do not return to how they were before COVID-19.

Slow but steady return: involves a gradual return to 'business as usual' with the continuing removal of lockdown measures. This enables businesses and services to reopen in full – although specific individual impacts on health and wellbeing or employment may remain.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR HTC PARTNERSHIPS

The table below can be used to think through what each scenario might mean in three overlapping areas: (i) people in crisis, (ii) relationships in project teams and with partners, and (iii) what this might require practically for project delivery. You could add extra rows if other areas are relevant for your partnership. Further ideas about each of these areas are included on the following pages.
A clean template version is available to fill out by clicking on the image on the right. This could be used at a team or partnership meeting, or with the people a partnership supports through a user experience group.

	Recurring lockdowns	**Permanent change**	**Slow but steady return**
Impact on people in crisis *Partnerships might want to think about the impact on: access to services, differences between groups of people, the types of advice/ support required.*	Are there any new groups of people who might need support? What support will they need? What is the best way of reaching these groups?	Who might be prevented from accessing support if services are only available in person or online? Who might be affected if some types of support cannot be offered e.g. outreach, group work?	What types of advice might people be more likely to need now? In six months' time?
Impact on teams and partnerships *Partnerships might want to think about the impact on: supporting staff and teams within an organisation, as well as partnership working including referrals.*	How will staff be supported as restrictions ease and tighten? Are the referral criteria appropriate, or do they need to be more flexible to reflect changing needs?	How much flexibility is there for staff to decide how, where and when they want to work?	Are there other organisations a partnership should start or continue working with? How might staff be supported to return to offices?
Impact on project delivery *Partnerships might want to think about the impact on: the project delivery model, practical measures, the resources/ funding required, how a project captures learning, the impact of changing levels of demand.*	Who could you work with to apply for additional funding? How would you change delivery models or approaches e.g. working with volunteers?	How could you involve the people you work with in redesigning a service?	What steps are required to reopen offices safely? What would be the impact of changing demand for services?

1. PEOPLE IN CRISIS

The lockdown has affected how people access services and the types of support they need to resolve a crisis.

Recurring lockdowns

- Results in repeated closures of physical spaces, removing access to support for those not online.

- Some crises are acerbated including those related to domestic violence, mental and physical health.

- Relaxations of measures provide a window to prepare. For example, providing the required technology or training for people who are digitally excluded.

Permanent change

- The appetite for face to face support remains low as people find it easier to communicate online.

- Centres which do reopen have strict social distancing measures which change the feel of the space. This also prevents certain types of support such as high-risk group activities and close contact.

- Some people find it difficult to cope with the changes. Social isolation and mental health problems become increasingly prevalent.

Slow but steady return

- Advice centres slowly reopen with social distancing measures in place which are gradually relaxed.

- The economic impacts have a lasting effect, with unemployment levels remaining high. This disproportionately affects certain groups such as young people.

- Government support schemes end. Services see increasing need for employment, housing and debt advice.

Example from North East Law Centre

The North East Law Centre has started developing a survey for staff and service users. The survey is designed to gauge willingness to go back to working in offices and return to face to face service delivery, as well as understanding differing support needs. By speaking to staff and service users, they hope to understand people's anxieties and help to determine when or whether services return to normal.

"We are doing a survey to test the ground. Firstly for our staff because reopening the [support centre] has a lot of issues for anxiety [and] health and safety issues. For our clients it's a different survey in terms of how we provide that service digitally, because knowing our clients don't respond digitally anyway, we will have to find a way to engage with them."

Lead partner staff

2. TEAMS AND PARTNERSHIPS

Social distancing and remote working bring new ways of communicating within teams and with partner organisations.

Recurring lockdowns

- Ongoing uncertainty about the future of the pandemic continues to impact the mental and physical wellbeing of staff.

- Partnership working becomes more difficult without face to face meetings and some organisations are unable to prioritise the HtC project due to other demands.

Permanent change

- Some staff prefer to continue working from home. New ways of supporting staff wellbeing and managing teams who are both working remotely and from an office are necessary.

- New skills are needed to support people in crisis. This could involve training, recruitment or identifying new partners who work in areas where there is a rise in demand for support, such as mental health and employment.

- Partnerships require alternative means of communicating on a long-term basis, for example regular calls to discuss referrals.

Slow but steady return

- The pace of returning to an office varies for different people or types of organisations. Finding a pace that teams are comfortable with is important.

- Communicating with partner organisations, for example about organisational changes and new ways of working help to maintain effective partnerships.

Example from the Axis Youth Hub

The Axis Youth Hub has recently changed the format of their wider partnership meetings. Instead of using these meetings primarily as a space for referrals and updates, they now also reflect on lessons they have learnt while responding to COVID-19. This change in format is intended to encourage the sharing of good practice among different organisations and create a culture of learning.

"One of the things I did with the last wider partnership meeting was to have a COVID-19 theme. 'What are you doing? What has worked particularly well?' So people could share their best practice. We are looking at using those meetings more thematically moving forward."

Lead partner staff

3. PROJECT DELIVERY

The needs of people in crisis and a partnership's approach to working with others should inform decisions about changes to project delivery.

⚠️ Recurring lockdowns

- Local authorities come under further strain and rely increasingly on community organisations to provide services which are traditionally delivered by statutory services.

- Organisations decide whether to reopen centres, with the potential for spaces to close again.

- Investment is made in home working equipment so staff can provide support during lockdowns. Policies are also revised to reflect new ways of working.

Permanent change

- Some organisations decide not to reopen physical centres, changing their delivery model to focus on online or telephone support.

- Investment is made in protective equipment including PPE and screens for those working in a physical location.

- Organisations explore opportunities to increase capacity to deliver more intensive support to those who have missed out during the lockdown.

Slow but steady return

- Organisations slowly reopen centres, starting with appointment based 1:1 support before returning to a drop-in model and group activities.

- Referral criteria are reviewed to reflect changing needs and the level of demand.

- New relationships allow organisations to influence local services. This could include sharing learning from the pandemic and working with people who received support to amplify their voices.

Example from Mid-Norfolk Citizens Advice

The Mid-Norfolk Citizens Advice project is planning on soon re-opening their office so that face to face support can be provided. At the same time they will continue to provide support online and via telephone. Before allowing staff back into the office they conducted a risk assessment. A number of measures will be put in place to protect staff, such as having restrictions on the number of staff allowed in the office and installing protective screens.

"We will still have restrictions on office opening times, we won't be open all the time…The change will be that it will be blended so some remote and some face to face support. The person sitting with the client might not necessarily be the advisor, the advisor might be sitting at home and someone will set up the laptop for the client."

Lead partner staff

WHAT NEXT?

Planning for the future is always challenging and may not feel like a priority given the significant amount of work which has already gone into redesigning HtC services. However, it is important to consider different future scenarios to help respond to what happens next – whether government schemes continue, we see repeated local lockdowns, or a vaccine or effective treatment is developed before the end of the year.

We hope this learning paper provides a number of tools HtC partnerships can use to help structure how they think about the future. Below we have included links to further resources that provide additional information and ideas.

Please feel free to get in touch with HelpthroughCrisis@ipsos.com if you have any questions about this paper or would like to discuss how your HtC partnership is planning for the future.

Scenario planning

- An article from the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations about planning for an uncertain future in the age of COVID-19.

- An article from the National Council for Voluntary Organisations on scenario planning.

Service delivery during COVID-19

- A report by The National Lottery Community Fund on delivering services to people experiencing multiple disadvantage during COVID-19.

- A report by Citizens Advice on protecting households facing debt during COVID-19.

Recent LSE team resources

COVID-19 factsheets exploring:

- Staff wellbeing

- Digital inclusion

- Effectively engaging with people online

Recordings from the recent webinars can be found at the links below:

- Staff wellbeing

- Remote co-production

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APPENDIX

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1. STAYING AWARE OF AND CATEGORISING FUTURE RISKS

It is important to categorise risks in terms of impact and probability. The grid below can be used to map which changes to project delivery, people in crisis, and working with others, are likely to be high or low impact and high or low probability.

High impact

Risks in this corner are important to be aware of and understand the risks/ mitigations.

Risks in this corner are the most important to focus on – may require significant change to a service.

E.g. We cannot open our drop in-centre until 2021 due to social distancing requirements

Low probability

High probability

Risks in this corner are less important to focus on.

Risks in this corner are likely to lead to gradual changes therefore important to be aware of but unlikely to have a significant impact.

Low impact

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2. MANAGING AND MONITORING FUTURE RISKS

For each of these risks, begin to think about how to monitor the risk, the potential impact of the risk, and how to mitigate it. The template below is designed to help do this. A template of this table can be accessed here.

Risk (add below)	Monitoring How are you going to monitor and keep track of the risk?	Impact - RAG What would the potential impact of the risk be? You could use the following RAG method: Red: High impact, to be addressed first, if possible Amber: Potential to cause a medium impact Green: Unlikely to cause a significant impact	Mitigation How can you mitigate or avoid the risk? How will you implement the solution/mitigation?

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THANK YOU!

We'd like to thank all the HtC projects and partnerships who have contributed to this paper:

Wyre Forest Nightstop

Mid-Norfolk Citizens Advice

Lancashire Citizens Advice

Newcastle Law Centre

Access Dorset

Birmingham Rathbone

Citizens Advice in North and West Kent

WomenCentre, Halifax

MindOUT

Cambridge Crisis Network

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If you have any comments or questions about any of the issues discussed in this paper, please get in touch with the Learning, Support and Evaluation team using the email address below, or via the Slack platform.

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