

November 2020

Help through Crisis

Planning and preparing for future changes in demand

Learning, Support & Evaluation webinar
Summary report

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. It 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 small voluntary groups and established charities to work together locally. 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 & Evaluation webinars

In April 2020, the Learning, Support and Evaluation (LSE) team interviewed HtC partnerships to understand how we can help you during the Covid-19 crisis. These conversations highlighted several specific areas you would like further support with as you adapt to a very different context. Partnerships said that *managing changes in demand* during the pandemic was an important issue, and this was the focus for our fourth webinar.

Delivered by



Ipsos MORI



Creating Connections
Hopkins Van Mil

1. Purpose of the planning and preparing for future changes in demand webinar



HtC planning and preparing for future changes in demand webinars took place on 5 and 7 October 2020 involving 19 HtC partnerships. Each session lasted an hour, and started with a 30 minute presentation by Sophie Wilson, Associate Director at Ipsos MORI. Sophie shared learning from the [Planning and Preparing for Future Changes in Demand](#) learning paper (August 2020). The webinar had four aims – to:

- Share learning and resources from the preparing and planning for future changes in demand learning paper
- Apply learning about preparing and planning for the future to a HtC context
- Give partnerships an opportunity to reflect on successes and challenges during the pandemic and how they might manage changing demand and plan for the future
- Capture learning from the webinar for wider dissemination

The presentation was followed by a facilitated discussion giving partnerships an opportunity to reflect on successes and challenges during the pandemic and how they might better plan for changes in demand during a time of significant uncertainty.

This summary highlights key themes, ideas and solutions for supporting this important planning work that partnerships raised during the two discussions.

2. Key themes

2.1 Seizing opportunities

'We've been thinking about what we have learnt from this current world that might actually improve things in the future for us'

Lead partner staff

Efficient working

Partnerships presented a varied picture of how change in demand is being managed during the pandemic. As we have seen in previous webinars on co-production and digital inclusion, for some this has been an opportunity to learn how to work differently using digital tools and online platforms. Partnerships also spoke of the benefits of dealing with queries about crisis by email and phone in terms of time and resource efficiencies, and saw this as a longer term solution to providing efficient support to beneficiaries, not just a necessary response to the current crisis.

Some partnerships had considered this as an opportunity to review how staff work in the future. Acceptance that working from home is likely to be reality for some time has encouraged some to consider substantial restructuring of how they work. This could include, for example, reducing office size and paying fewer overheads to address challenges in funding in the future; or continuing to work flexible hours which creates opportunities for some staff to be available to beneficiaries later in the evening and at the weekend (because they have requested alternative working hours from 9-5).

Working differently with beneficiaries

Another opportunity arises from the fact that drop-in services can't be run as they were before (i.e. face to face). This means that staff are dealing with fewer people who 'dip in and out' of support services. For some partnerships, this has been a great disappointment with staff feeling that they are not supporting the beneficiaries that they should be. However, others feel they have been able to offer those who stay within the HtC programme more engaged, in-depth case work, working with beneficiaries to find longer-term and more meaningful support for their crisis.

Delivered by



Ipsos MORI



Creating Connections
Hopkins Van Mil

Partnerships

Opportunities to work more closely with partnerships have been presented during the pandemic. Partnerships reported that relevant staff in partnership organisations, including local council staff, have been more likely to give their direct telephone number to local organisations rather than the generic organisation number. This has meant that there can be much closer and regular cooperation on planning and decision making for managing demand. Using an online platform instead of physical meetings has also meant that the meetings themselves are more efficient as meetings need to be shorter online and staff do not have to travel to attend.

2.2 The calm before the storm

'I think a lot of our clients we think are maybe burying their head in the sand and thinking, 'I can't be evicted at the moment and I can't do this at the moment. The job centre are not chasing me. I can't be sanctioned,' and all the rest of it and I think there's a big explosion due.'

Lead partner staff

However difficult the pandemic situation in the last seven months has been for beneficiaries and the partnerships supporting them, for some the current lockdown is just the beginning of a situation that they expect to worsen over time. Partnerships expressed the view that the impacts of events happening now will not necessarily be felt immediately; some months, or even years, may pass before the full effects are visible. There was a sense that some beneficiaries, particularly young people, are not facing up to demands for rent arrears, or the knock-on effects of debt, or potential evictions and redundancies that will have a serious impact on their lives. Participants spoke in dramatic terms of 'explosions' and 'storms on the horizon' highlighting that planning now must take in to account an increase of demand and crisis situations well into next year and beyond.

2.3 Conflicting demands

'We're juggling with a whole load of uncertainty and scariness and it's hard to know what the right thing to do is.'

Lead partner staff

One of the challenges expressed by partnerships is trying to plan for the future while managing competing, complex and challenging demands with no clear path to the future. Participants spoke of increased demand for support for people experiencing domestic abuse, street homelessness and sudden unemployment leading to financial crisis and mental health issues. This is alongside the additional challenges of partnerships not being as visible as they would normally be in the community, and not being able to run drop-in services. This is also against a back-drop, for some, of uncertainty in future funding streams (see below). Partnerships said they found it hard to get off the 'hamster wheel' of reacting only to today's crisis to plan strategically for the future.

2.4 Funding for the future

'I think it's difficult, because our project finishes in June. It's quite difficult to plan for all these scenarios when you've got an end date and limited flexibility. There's not a lot more we can do.'

Lead partner staff

For some the fact that the HtC programme will end in summer 2021 has meant that the current crisis is contextualised by getting through the situation rather than planning for the long-term. This has meant planning has, for some, tended to be reactive. For others, time has been spent applying for funding. This has been a challenge when local funders have, understandably, been interested in supporting the immediate crisis and less in strategic funding for longer-term projects. Some are concerned that, if they are unable to open their offices, they will lose the funding they receive from local authorities for running their premises.

Other partnerships are in a more positive situation with regards to funding. The fact that they have run an HtC programme has opened doors for sustainable funding from other grant giving trusts and foundations, and/ or by partnering with other local authority projects who have confidence in their abilities given the achievements of the HtC project. Participants discussed the fact that designing and managing their HtC projects means they have learned about how to deliver crisis support. This includes learning about how best to address the different kinds of crisis beneficiaries face, and how to support a wide range of people. Partnerships also have a better understanding of the types of intervention and co-production activities that support beneficiaries to avoid crisis in future. Partnerships are now sharing this learning within their organisations and with partners, improving crisis support work that will continue when their HtC project has finished. This learning also means partnerships have been able to make better, more evidence-based funding applications.

3. Planning for the future solutions and ideas

In sharing their approaches to planning in times of uncertainty, partnerships emphasised the importance of being flexible and adaptable in the face of constant change – and planning with that mindset rather than with rigid parameters in place. Partnerships appreciated the proposal in the learning paper to treat planning tools as live documents.

'As a project manager my usual stance would be to plan a project in quite rigid terms, and to really judge the project based on meeting these deadlines that I'd previously set. Now I think planning has become a much more live and reactive process.'

Lead partner staff

Delivered by



Ipsos MORI



Creating Connections
Hopkins Van Mil

Some examples of specific solutions being scoped and delivered by HtC partnerships include:

- Putting plans in place with multiple options using different hypothetical scenarios (as suggested in the learning paper and Sophie's presentation). For some partnerships this has meant creating plans with three (or more) options, mapping out what happens in each scenario. The scenarios cover: if lockdown is extended for long periods; if the country/ regions of the country go in and out of lockdown; if there is a slow but steady return to something akin to normal.
- Setting up a 'Beyond Covid-19 Task Force' within their partnership to assess what's happened because of the pandemic and work as a team to plan for the future. The Task Force could be drawn from across the partnership, coming together to devise a strategy informed by all the available data on how they have managed changing demand during the pandemic. The Task Force would look at their own statistics and data, but also draw on information from across their region and the country, using this to conduct a horizon scanning analysis of factors, including Covid-19, unemployment and housing shortages, which are likely to have an impact on demand for crisis support in the future.
- Planning for what you can plan for, and not focusing too much on what has been lost, has been a strategy that has worked for many partnerships. This has allowed them to look forward with their beneficiaries, focusing on managing the support they receive differently without focusing too much on the loss of face-to-face support. These partnerships have encouraged staff to see this as an opportunity to work more efficiently and in ways which are even more tailored to the specific needs of the beneficiary, for example for longer, or more in-depth. This also encompasses working more flexibly to meet the needs of beneficiaries, and staff working differently to manage child-care and other caring/ family commitments whilst working from home.
- A number of partnerships flagged that planning to keep a face-to-face option open wherever possible was important so that demand for those new to crisis support can be managed effectively. Some were using a hybrid option; for example, advertising in the community that if beneficiaries put their phone number through the letterbox of the HtC premises someone will call them back to help them. This has been particularly beneficial for beneficiaries without access to digital tools. Partnerships have also been thinking laterally about the opportunities for working 'apart but together' with beneficiaries, for example in walk and talk sessions in a local park, or with beneficiaries in one room and the adviser in another within the building connected by a zoom link.

Partnerships welcomed the learning paper as a valuable resource for thinking through a range of complex scenarios to manage future demand in a time of enormous uncertainty. They made full use of the opportunity of discussing these with others in the webinar and sharing potential solutions to planning with these frameworks and tools in mind.

For more information

Website: [The National Lottery Community Fund – Insights from our funding](#)

Email: helpthroughcrisis@ipsos.com