



**Children's
Neighbourhoods
Scotland**

**COVID-19 South Lanarkshire
Research Briefing:
Collaboration
December 2020**

Children's Neighbourhoods Scotland

Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought into sharp focus the inequalities affecting children and families in South Lanarkshire, and how these have been heightened by the crisis. The aim of this research was to examine service responses to the COVID-19 virus pandemic and the experiences of families, children and young people. This briefing focusses on learning in relation to collaboration between services and offers recommendations on how this can be developed in the future.

An overview of the research methodology and approach used in this research is presented as an Appendix at the end of this briefing.

This briefing paper forms one of a suite of resources published from the CNS COVID-19 research programme. The full research report, other thematic briefing papers and short insight papers are available on [the CNS website](#).

Key points and recommendations

- In some high poverty rural areas in South Lanarkshire, initial take up of emergency food provision via the community wellbeing helpline was low. Local service providers worked in collaboration and re-designed food provision to overcome the stigma of poverty by providing mobile 'food larders'.
- Further research is needed into the barriers to accessing support in high poverty rural areas.
- The pan-Lanarkshire Resilience Planning Group included third sector representation, which was a positive step towards strategic partnership working between the public and third sector.
- Action should be taken to ensure that the cross-sector community planning processes are embedded as a key mechanism for emergency response and recovery planning.
- The role of community planning officials and interface organisations is key in coordinating local action, sharing information and enabling learning across sectors, as well as facilitating an ongoing process of culture change. These key roles need to be valued and recognised to help ensure that the collaborative gains achieved through the COVID-19 response are sustained.

Collaboration and coordination between local services

This briefing describes how the local authority, public and third sector partners in South Lanarkshire, worked together in response to the pandemic and national lockdown. This report is divided into two sections. The first section considers the role of community planning, and the second discusses local forms of collaboration and signs of a change in perceptions about the potential for collaborative working between sectors.

The detailed research findings from this section can be found in the [full research report](#) (see Bynner et al. 2020).

Community planning

In South Lanarkshire the third sector interface (TSI) was involved in strategic planning with the directors of public services through representation on the pan-Lanarkshire Resilience Planning Group. At the same time the established mechanism of cross-sector collaboration - the Community Planning Partnership - was suspended. An interviewee felt that the suspension of community planning was a lost opportunity for communication at a crucial stage of coordination and planning for the pandemic response:

Now, in the normal world, I would say we're really quite closely linked through the community planning structures. But what was strange to me was in that first few weeks there was just nothing, and I felt really out of the loop actually [...] So it kind of siloed things [...] And I found myself chasing people to say, what's happening about this, because we could support you with this, we could deploy some staff to help you with this or we're doing a bit of x, y and z around deliveries and how does that link with what you're doing? So, it felt to me personally not very joined-up at the start. And I think that was just the absolute pace of things (Gemma, public sector).

Prior to the pandemic local officers sought to develop locality networks in line with the Community Empowerment Act 2015:

There was a need for intermediate structures in South Lanarkshire. Something that bridged the gap between small community led planning, and neighbourhood planning areas, and the CPP [community planning partnership] Board; that gave a voice, at a locality level; that pulled issues together (Rachel, public sector).

During the pandemic this 'locality planning' approach aligned with the practical and urgent need to organise a joint response at a local level. Initially, the larger voluntary sector organisations were invited to attend but local officials and the TSI soon recognised the need for a more inclusive approach and expanded the membership of locality networks to include smaller, locally embedded charities and community groups.

Local collaboration and changing perceptions

During the lockdown, new collaborations developed between public sector officials and local third sector organisations and groups to meet the needs of communities. Locality networks enabled a targeted, place-based response to the pandemic with different service models adapted to the needs of different populations. In some high poverty areas, there was low take up of support from the wellbeing helpline.

In areas where there was a stigma surrounding food poverty local services adopted a 'community larder' approach to food provision. This was achieved through a partnership between a third sector organisation, with a focus on supporting the health of families and children, and the local authority. Food was supplied by the local authority and delivered to a local authority building where staff from the third sector organisation were present: 'There was one door in, one door out, and the food was all

set up on tables, so people were able to go in and collect what they wanted' (Linda, public sector).

The community larders engaged new families in some high poverty areas, however, in some areas, numbers remained low.

The lack of engagement from these areas with the wellbeing line became very, very evident. So, we weren't sure if there was a fear of people contacting the council's line in case they were going to be asked about their rent, their council tax [...] But it became very, very evident to us that these areas, where there was high deprivation and large, large families, weren't engaging (Linda, public sector).

This prompted local services to co-design a more tailored and targeted approach, which resulted in the development of a 'mobile larder' - a van driven by staff from the third sector organisation which brought ready-made bags of food and provisions and provided information and advice on benefits and financial support to local families. This localised and collaborative approach to food provision was tailored to try to meet individual and local needs.

Interviewees described how the response to the lockdown from the third sector had led to signs of a change in perceptions from the public sector regarding the value of working in partnership. Although interviewees also expressed concerns that when the lockdown ended the public sector might 'revert back' to siloed ways of working.

Discussion

This briefing has presented research findings in relation to collaboration between local service providers in South Lanarkshire during the pandemic. In this final section we discuss some of the key themes and points of learning gained from the research.

In South Lanarkshire, many statutory services suspended or reduced their services with the announcement of lockdown. For the local authority and third sector partners there were logistical challenges and operational issues to overcome, as well as new national government guidance and public health briefings to interpret and act upon. The focus of attention was understandably on the most immediate and critical issues, establishing the community wellbeing helpline and organising food deliveries. Community planning, the formal mechanism for strategic planning across sectors, ceased to operate. The TSI was engaged in the pan-Lanarkshire Resilience Planning Group and a 'Chief Officers group' of third sector organisations continued to meet and collaborate throughout this period. The suspension of community planning meetings resulted in some community planning partners feeling 'out of the loop' without an avenue to link into the community response work. The suspension of the formal mechanisms of community planning at the early stages of the pandemic was regarded as a missed opportunity for joint working. It also suggests that community planning is still regarded as additional, rather than essential to, strategic planning (Escobar et al., 2018; Weakley and Escobar, 2018).

The focus of the collaborative effort in South Lanarkshire was on the coordination of food supplies and deliveries between the council and third sector organisations at a local level. This did not go as far

as full-service integration but did include sharing resources, buildings, vehicles and supplies, regular communication across agencies and sectors, shared learning and co-design of local services. The collaboration between the local authority and third sector organisations during the early stages of the pandemic clearly demonstrated interdependence and enhanced capability through working together.

Conclusion

Himmelman (2002) describes organisations that truly collaborate as those that have a '*willingness to enhance each other's capacity for mutual benefit and a common purpose*'. This willingness was evident in the locality networks in South Lanarkshire. There were strong indications of increased trust and cooperation across sectors in the coordination of emergency food provision and other support for vulnerable families.

The crisis brought partners together across sectors with the shared objective of protecting and supporting communities. It is important that this collaborative effort is recognised and celebrated as a significant achievement in the most difficult circumstances. The extent to which this collaborative work has fundamentally changed the nature of the relationship between the local authority and the third sector in the longer term remains to be seen. Community planning officials and TSIs play a key role in supporting culture change across the local governance system. The structures that have emerged in South Lanarkshire, driven by the COVID-19 pandemic, offer an opportunity to build on this new collaborative momentum and strengthen joint working across services and sectors in the longer term.

References

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Appendix: Research approach and methodology

From June to September 2020, 10 qualitative interviews were conducted with service providers, working across a range of services in the public and third sectors including: youth work, family support, befriending, education services, health improvement, and community planning. Semi-structured interviews were conducted by phone or on Zoom video conferencing software and lasted approximately 45-60 minutes. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.

A decision was taken to interview frontline professionals with established and trusting relationships with children and families in high poverty areas to understand the breadth of experience of service delivery during lockdown. This was achieved without risk of causing harm or difficulty to families at a time of high anxiety. The research met the highest standards of ethical research conduct, research integrity, data management and data protection, as approved by the University of Glasgow.

The voices and perspectives represented in this report are those of service professionals. Research participants were anonymised to ensure confidentiality. Services and organisations were categorised by sector (public or third sector).

The detailed research approach, methodology and interviewee pseudonym and designation is presented in the full research report.



Children's Neighbourhoods Scotland

This report is published by Children's Neighbourhoods Scotland.

About us

A children's neighbourhood is an initiative that brings together people, resources and organisations in a neighbourhood area, so that all of those things can work together towards better lives for the children living there.

Children's Neighbourhoods Scotland is a collaborative centre, developed by Glasgow Centre for Population Health, Policy Scotland and Robert Owen Centre at the University of Glasgow.



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