

Evaluation of the Response, Recovery & Resilience Fund

(Phase 2 & 3)

July 2021



Foundation
Scotland



Introduction

Foundation Scotland is Scotland's community foundation. We work to a vision of confident, thriving, resilient communities across Scotland. We combine knowledge, finance, and expertise to work with communities across the country and distribute thousands of grant awards every year, to support local charities and community growth. We take a developmental approach, alongside responding to immediate and vital demands.

We launched the Response, Recovery and Resilience Fund (RRR Fund) on Friday 27th March 2020 with funding from the National Emergencies Trust (NET) plus donations from new and existing donors. The overall aim of the fund was to help those (most) affected by the recent coronavirus outbreak. The first phase of funding focused on the immediate response to the pandemic and found that the main challenges for the grant recipients were:

- Responding to increased levels of need that have been identified or exacerbated through the pandemic.
- Protecting mental health by dealing with and responding to the additional stresses caused by social isolation and the economic impact of lockdown.
- Adjusting to the new 'normal' after the emergency phase has passed – this included adapting working practices and providing continued financial and emergency support to vulnerable groups.
- Ensuring the long-term viability and sustainability of the projects.

The second and third phases of the fund were designed to support communities to recover from Covid-19 and develop greater community resilience.

This evaluation aims to gain insight into the difference the funding has made to groups and communities and understand their next set of challenges in the short, medium, and long-term.

This evaluation captures the views of a wide range of recipients of the RRR Fund second and third phases. This was conducted through an electronic survey to 694 small grant recipients who applied for funding between August 2020 and February 2021. The survey had a 30% response rate, with 205 complete responses received. In addition to the survey, three focus groups were held with 25 people from a range of recipient organisations.

This report draws on all research undertaken to highlight the key impacts of the funding and the main challenges facing grantees at present and in the future. Findings from this report will help to inform our grantmaking practices when developing and delivering future emergency funding responses.

Executive Summary and recommendations about future emergency funding

This evaluation focuses on the impact of the RRR funds on communities and project beneficiaries and the impact on the community infrastructure that supports resilience and community responses. We have also explored the key challenges and opportunities for community projects and organisations as they seek to 'build forward better' after the pandemic.

In this section, we provide a summary of the key findings in relation to each of these areas and make some suggestions and recommendations about future emergency funding based on these findings.

Impact on communities and project beneficiaries

There continues to be a big impact for communities and project beneficiaries of the RRR funding. This ranges from the continuation of emergency support, particularly concerning food provision and mental health, through activities designed to help people re-engage with wider society as the restrictions ease.

The survey and focus groups show that the greatest impact was around meeting need, both in terms of "meeting the immediate practical needs of isolated people" and "tackling loneliness and promoting positive living, wellbeing and resilience". The practical and innovative activities provided by the grant recipients clearly show their determination to focus on their communities and service users and maximise the impact of their services in what have been very fast-changing and trying circumstances over the past 12 months.

The variety of activities and services provided by the grant recipients demonstrates their continued innovative and creative but efficient approach to the response to Covid-19. What emerged very strongly was the ability of the grant recipients to adapt to changing circumstances. That they were able to do this quickly and effectively was due in no small part to the flexibility of the funder in how they used their allocated grant. We have also seen the wider impact (ripple effect) of some of the practical support that projects have offered beyond the immediate service provided.

Suggestions and Recommendations

- R1** The biggest impacts identified through the evaluation have been about meeting the immediate practical needs of isolated people, tackling loneliness and improving health and wellbeing. To help projects achieve maximum impact then the focus of funding on practical activities and support is essential.
- R2** Responding to changing needs is an important factor in emergency situations such as the Covid-19 pandemic. Funders should seek to invest in/support applicants to identify and change services quickly as circumstances develop.
- R3** Funders should be prepared to recognise and support changes in activities/services as local circumstances develop. Future emergency funding should not be too tightly bound to stated activities in applications as these may well need to change in a very short period of time.

Impact on community projects/organisations

RRR funding has had a number of positive impacts on the funded organisations. Most of the projects valued the flexibility of the RRR funding and the trust placed in them to deliver appropriate support in their communities. Participants in the evaluation saw this trust and flexibility as something to take forward into future funding programmes, whether or not in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. It was pointed out that uncertainty about what type of provision is needed and how the money will best be spent is in the nature of working with communities. New needs and priorities, challenges and opportunities, will emerge during the process, and funding flexibility enables projects to adapt accordingly.

Suggestions and Recommendations

- R4** Funders trust in the organisations is fundamental to supporting quick and effective responses to emergencies. Therefore, a focus on building the capacity of organisations to develop their responses is crucial. Investment in organisations' ability to identify need, plan quickly and effectively, and respond to change would be a valuable focus of any future emergency funding. This includes investment in the admin/IT systems that may be needed.
- R5** A strong feature of the responses to our evaluation was how the organisations valued the funding to allow them to plan ahead and develop their organisational response. Future investment should recognise the importance of flexible funding for development and planning time.
- R6** Most of the organisations that participated in the evaluation are relatively small with few staff, if any, and a high dependence on volunteers. Investment in paid staff capacity (possibly shared between several organisations) would be viewed as a positive use of funding in future emergencies.
- R7** The roles of staff and volunteers have changed significantly during the pandemic and continue to do so as we emerge from lockdown and associated restrictions. Investment in volunteer and staff training as a response to different or changing roles is highly recommended.

Impact on Community Infrastructure

One of the key developments apparent through the Covid-19 pandemic has been the increase in collaboration and cooperation amongst community organisations and their statutory and voluntary sector partners. Key positive developments include:

- sharing of buildings and other resources
- referrals between different community organisations
- coordination of services and activities
- an increase in collaboration to achieve the most effective responses

The picture was more mixed when it came to collaboration with statutory organisations and services. There was agreement that the agile and nimble third-sector and community-led response to the pandemic has raised the profile of voluntary and community organisations. Some felt that they were 'round the table' with statutory organisations to a degree they had not been before. Another positive was the facilitation of networks by statutory bodies such as local authorities,

community planning and enterprise agencies. However, there was also some concern about the slow and sometimes unhelpful response of statutory organisations such as local authorities.

Suggestions and Recommendations

- R8** The value of cross-project collaboration was highlighted by many of the evaluation participants. Future funding should promote and encourage collaborative approaches from the outset and actively encourage applications from local partnerships or collaborations. Maximum application amounts should be adjusted to reflect this.
- R9** Developing local collaborations takes time and energy. Funders need to consider this and invest in the time, skills and capacity of community projects to develop and sustain these collaborative efforts.
- R10** The role of community projects in taking leading roles in cross-sector responses to Covid-19 has been a feature of the past 12 months. Funders need to recognise the time and effort this takes and how best to support this in emergencies. It has been highlighted that the best and quickest collaborative responses have happened in the areas where there were good pre-existing relationships and collaborations. Therefore, investment in this kind of activity has a longer-term and wider positive impact.

Challenges and Opportunities

The engagement with RRR Fund recipients highlighted a range of key challenges for community projects and organisations: securing stable funding that will allow them to sustain their work and plan ahead with more confidence, support volunteers, and respond to mental health issues. However, there are positive opportunities that have emerged through the pandemic, including better relationships with statutory organisations, opportunities to co-produce services increased community cohesion/spirit and increased recognition of their work in the community.

Suggestions and Recommendations

- R11** Securing stable funding is a constant challenge for community projects and organisations. While emergency funding cannot resolve this directly, the input of funders to wider funding discussions can be instrumental in highlighting the impact of local projects and their role in developing more resilient communities.
- R12** One very positive aspect of the community response to Covid-19 has been an increase in volunteering. However, this also presents a challenge in sustaining their involvement and responding to volunteers' developmental and support needs. Future emergency funding should recognise the likelihood of increased volunteering and the extra strain this can put on small organisations (see R7).
- R13** The role of community projects in responding to mental health needs strongly featured when evaluating the RRR Fund Phase 1. This remains a high priority and reflects the amount of need that has surfaced during the pandemic. Most of the activities of the funded projects include some aspect of tackling mental health issues arising from isolation, poverty, and lack of social contact/connection, even where this has not been the explicit intention of the projects. Based on this experience, there is a strong case for future emergency funding to have discrete elements focused on responding to mental health issues and promoting positive mental health.
- R14** The development of a more equitable relationship between community projects and the statutory sector is a very positive development. However, to make this happen, many community projects need capacity building support so that they can participate in an informed and confident fashion. While this is not the main focus for emergency funders by themselves, it must be reflected in wider funding discussions and policy development on resilience and emergency responses.

How RRR funds have been used and the difference made

The total number of small grant recipients (grants up to £5,000) in the second and third phases of the fund was 694. The total funding awarded to these recipients was £3,274,667. The type of activities that the funding supported included:

- continued provision of essential support such as mental health services and emergency food provision
- transitioning activities and services to a more sustainable delivery model
- purchase of equipment and training of staff/volunteers to allow services to start to re-open safely
- support for children and young people to access physical activities
- providing essential support such as transport, equipment and clothing to enable people to start meeting up again (outside)

Most of the organisations who engaged with the evaluation used their funding to change or expand their services to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic. In most cases, this involved changing how their services were delivered. In many cases, they have also had to expand their service due to an increase in need. Many of the projects had also received funding in the RRR Response Phase and in some instances, had been able to access other funding to support their efforts.

It was clear from the research that the grantees were able to use the RRR Phase 2 and 3 funding to help them build on their early work and move from immediate emergency response to focusing on developing and sustaining their services in new and different ways.

In this section, we explore the impact that the funding has had:

- on the communities which the grant recipients are working with and/or providing services for
- the grant recipient organisations themselves
- the community infrastructure which they are part of or connected to

The responses come from both the survey and the focus group discussions, with brief examples used throughout to illustrate key themes.

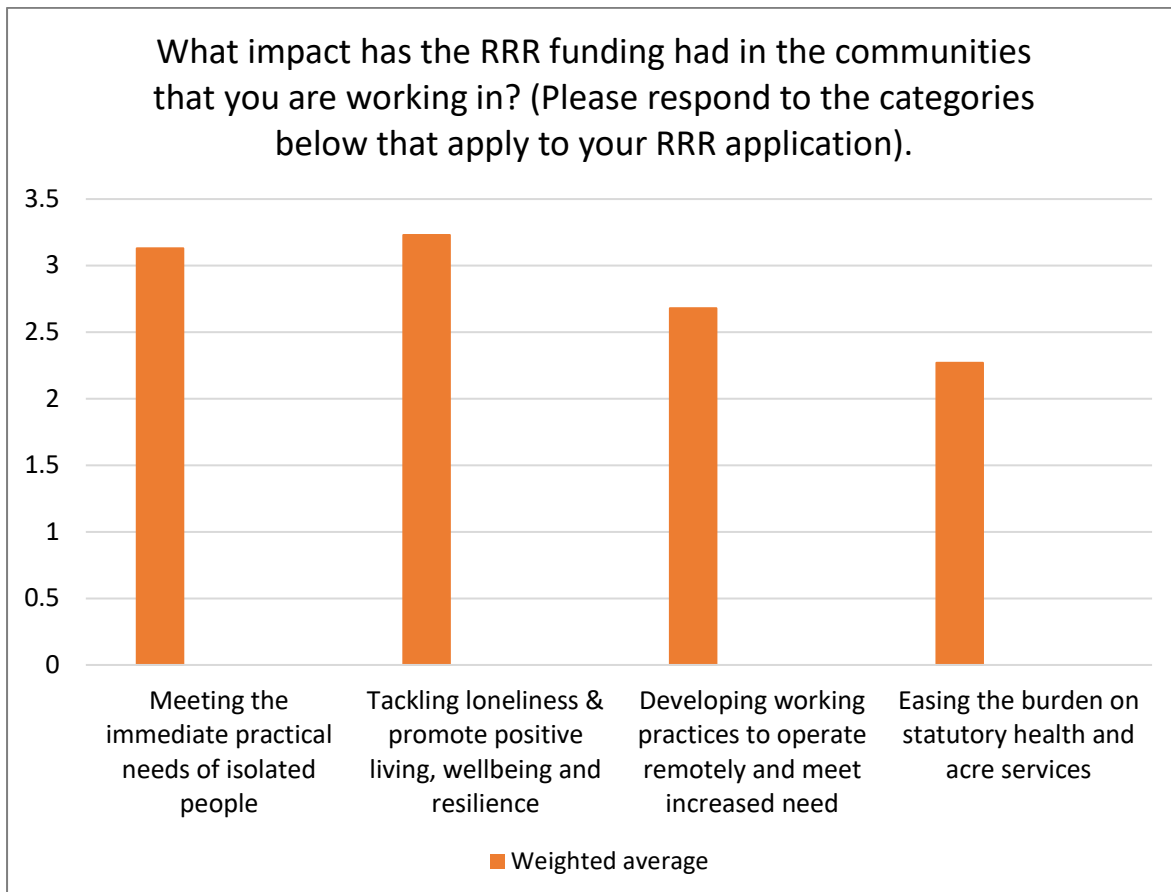
Impact on communities/beneficiaries

This section subdivides the impacts (where possible) into the SCVO categories, although many groups did indicate that their activities covered more than one area.

Respondents highlighted that the greatest impact was around meeting need, both in terms of "meeting the immediate practical needs of isolated people" (62.4% said

they had a strong impact on this) and "tackling loneliness and promoting positive living, wellbeing and resilience" (62.9% had a strong impact). A slightly lower percentage (49.3%) said they had a strong impact on "developing working practices to operate remotely and meet increased need".

The lowest number (30.7%) said they had a strong impact on "easing the burden on statutory health and care services". Compared to the other 3 options, a considerably higher number of people (14.6%) say they did not know.



There are many ways in which the impact on communities and recipients has been evident. Survey respondents stated that highlights for them included:

"Being able to meet regularly for self-management sessions has enabled members to learn ways of coping better and be able to support one another through this very difficult period."

"That a key food service has been able to help so many people on a weekly basis. Taking stress away and feeding children etc."

"To be able to reach out to anyone who is struggling with loneliness and isolation during the pandemic".

Many groups used the RRR funding to increase digital provision. This included delivering services online, providing staff, volunteers, and community members with digital equipment, training and support around digital skills. Online services included a range of physical activities, benefiting both physical as well as mental health.

However, organisations recognised that online provision was not suitable for everyone and took various approaches to address this. One provider of physical activities for older people in care homes used the RRR funding to develop 200 DVDs circulated to care homes. Social distancing rules meant that older people in care homes tended to participate in activities in pods of no more than four people, making online delivery impractical. Without the funding, many people that this organisation usually worked with would have been unable to participate in activities over the whole lockdown period.

Focus Group participants expanded on these areas and told us how the RRR funding had allowed them to continue working and delivering services even if their roles had changed. There were a range of examples mentioned that highlighted how creative and practical the projects had been in ensuring that they could still provide a worthwhile service during the pandemic. The practical measures included funding for transport to enable people to attend outdoor activities, cafe meet-ups during the period between lockdowns, the purchase of outdoor clothing to allow people to meet outdoors for 'walk and talk' sessions or similar and developing and delivering online physical activity classes. These activities aimed to improve people's mental and physical wellbeing, reduce social isolation, and tackle the genuine poverty issues faced by people in the communities that the projects were working in and with.

The focus group participants also described how they had developed activities and support for people aimed at helping them to make the transition from being limited to their own homes to starting to engage with their wider community and society. The very practical measures such as funding taxis were an absolutely essential part of making this happen. Projects were also aware of the issues around the increased use of digital and online communication in the early stages of the pandemic and the need to help people to use these communication methods effectively and safely. There was also a clear focus on helping people re-engage with others and not limit their activities to online.

Example: The Village Storytelling Centre

The Village Storytelling Centre is based in Pollok, Glasgow and uses storytelling to enable local people to have a voice in their community. The organisation also works wider than this and supports groups and organisations around Scotland to use storytelling to support health and wellbeing and build skills and confidence. After being funded to provide digital services and equipment in the first round of RRR funding, the centre received an additional amount to reach more people through arts materials and activities.

The funded activity was developed in recognition that not everyone can benefit from engaging online. For instance, some people were anxious about or reluctant to participate in sessions using video conferencing software. The centre therefore provided families and individuals with art packages. The RRR funding paid for the development of the packs and the postage for delivering them to people's houses. The Village Storytelling Centre describes the funding as enabling them to provide services where people were at in their lives. This is reinforced by the response from one of the parents:

"I really appreciate what you have done to accommodate the children during this difficult year during lockdown. You have brought families closer together by supplying all the packs for the arts and crafts activities. It has given us that chance where we could all sit down as a family and do the activities together while having fun and laughing together, without worrying about trying to spend the same amount of time with each child. There was something suitable for everyone in every pack, just being able to cater for all age groups was a big help and relief, and you took a lot of pressure off financially, ... just not having to worry about whether we have enough money to buy arts and crafts materials makes a big difference."

Using the funding, the centre was also able to purchase outdoor clothing for people. The wider impact of this can be described in terms of a "ripple effect", enabling people to take part in a range of outdoor activities over winter. One family fed back that the clothing had enabled them to engage in other activities in the community in addition to those offered by the Village Storytelling Centre.

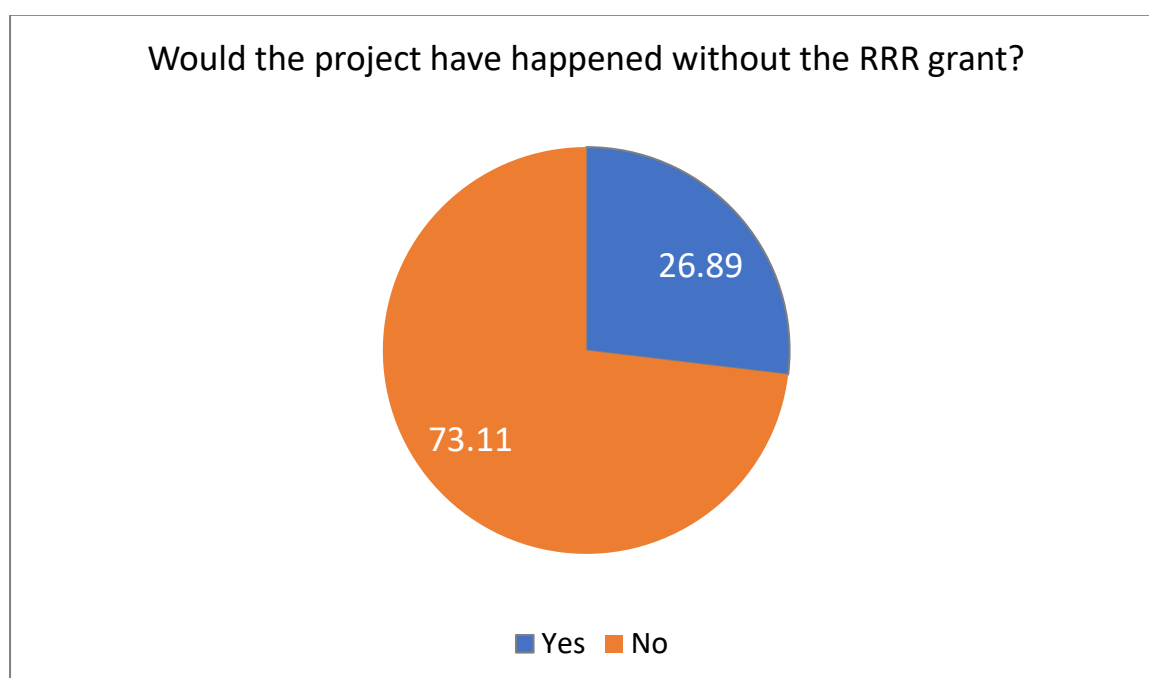
"I actually can't believe it, I mean I think it's fantastic. I feel like I am walking on clouds. You know what it's like, money is tight right now, and those waterproofs will last my girls right through to next year ... and it's going to help me get me off my backside too because the girls just want to get out and go to the park now that they are kitted out. Please pass on my appreciation to the funders."

For the centre, the provision of clothing had a dual impact. It not only extended what they were able to do for their existing service users but also increased their reach with families who had not engaged with their services before.

Impact of the funding on the community projects and organisations

RRR funding has had a number of positive impacts on the funded organisations. Many survey respondents reported that the funding was crucial to either setting up new activities in response to Covid-19 or sustaining ongoing activities. 154 out of 210 respondents (over 70%) said their project would not have happened without the RRR grant.

Another factor the grantees faced during the year was the constantly changing context with restrictions changing quickly and a second lockdown coming into place in the winter. In many cases, they had to adapt their planned activities and services to take account of the changing circumstances. It is clear that the nature of the RRR funding - particularly the flexibility and speed of response - helped the grantees to develop their own responses accordingly.



Comments in the survey included:

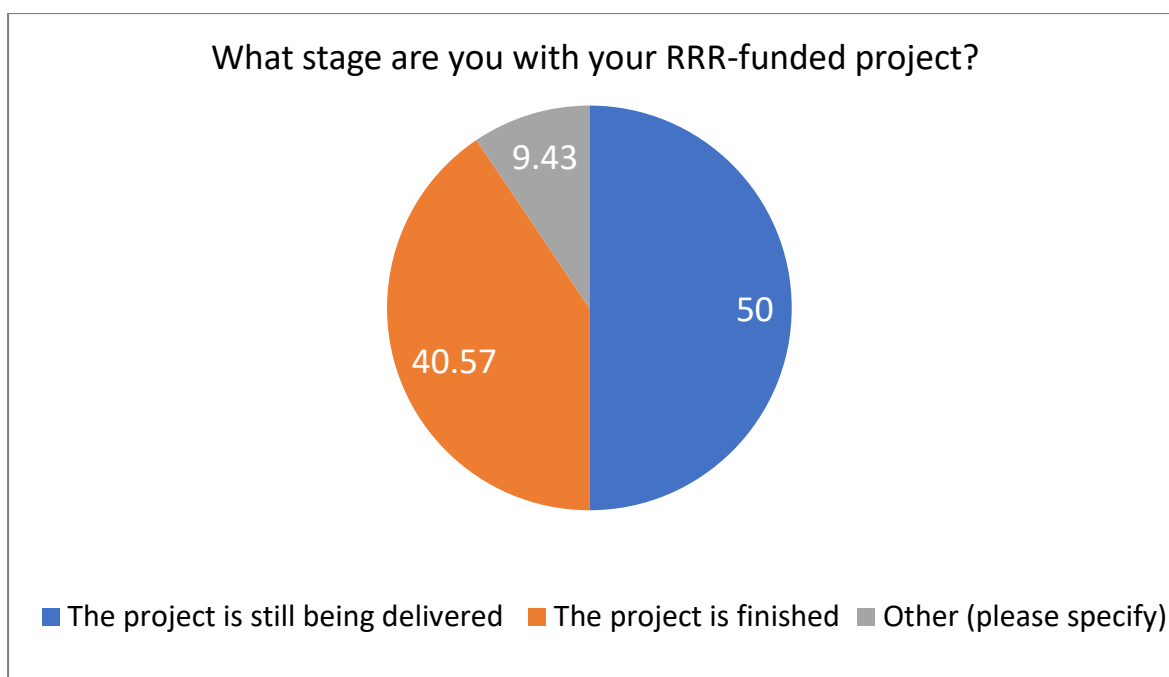
"The IT equipment will be utilised for the foreseeable future and has already made a massive impact on the day to day running of the organisation" (Survey response).

"The need and issues remain the same however, instead of being an online-based programme, it is becoming a face-to-face activity now that restrictions have eased" (Survey response).

"Support from other grant funders would have allowed services to be maintained, but the RRR grant has enabled us to run our services at the usual capacity rather than a reduced service." (Survey response).

"Moving services online has created a safe place for many service users to engage with us and has also allowed us to support other organisations outwith our usual operational area. Our information is free to use and download for anyone in Scotland, and this would not have been possible without the support of the RRR Fund." (Survey response).

Unsurprisingly, the delivery of many projects had been affected by the ever-changing situation regarding Covid-19 and associated restrictions. Although 40.1 % told us that their RRR-funded project was completed, 50% said their project is still being delivered.



That many projects are still continuing is not in itself evidence that progress has been stalled due to wider circumstances. Indeed, some projects are ongoing or core services that the RRR fund only partly or temporarily funded. Some respondents described how the fluid landscape had presented challenges, including staff being furloughed in one instance. In another, a project was waiting for an internet line to be installed before starting. Other comments included:

"The regulations changed after we received the funding, and we haven't been able to re-open our premises yet" (Survey response).

"We received funding towards our school holiday programme, we were hoping to start this earlier in the year but couldn't because of restrictions. However, we were able to carry out a Games Session within the Easter holidays with a small group of young people outdoors, which included a hot meal" (Survey response).

Covid restrictions affected the availability of some activities, e.g. courses had to be done online rather than in person" (Survey response).

The second extended lockdown in Scotland prevented a large amount of activities from taking place, which has had a big impact on a lot of the grant recipients. The above examples show how projects have changed course since grants were awarded, and the flexibility of the RRR fund is something grant recipients found particularly positive. Many respondents to the survey and participants in our focus groups valued the flexibility of the RRR funding and the trust placed in them to deliver appropriate support in their communities. Participants in our focus groups saw this trust and flexibility as something to take forward into future funding programmes, whether or not in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. It was pointed out that uncertainty about what type of provision is needed and how the money will best be spent is in the nature of working with communities. New needs and priorities, challenges and opportunities, will emerge during the process, and funding flexibility enables projects to adapt accordingly.

"For us, it enabled our team to adapt continuously over the year to changing needs and as we learned more about our approach, practice and how our community was changing" (Survey respondent).

"Initially, the funding was for a food support service to people who could not get out, this has developed into a community foodbank where needs of families and others in need are being serviced on a weekly basis where no similar project existed before pandemic."

Example: Headway East Lothian

Headway East Lothian (HEL) is a local branch of the UK-wide charity Headway that works to improve life after brain injury by providing vital support and information services. They received £5000 from the RRR fund to change how they delivered much-needed services, when all their "normal" ways of helping were either restricted or unable to function.

"Our Funders were wonderful in their response to the pandemic and the impact social isolation and loneliness would have on our already disadvantaged community. We sourced additional funding streams that had set up emergency responses; built up a strategy; and changed our outcomes and activities to respond and enable us to continue to work in a different way. This involved putting together a plan to build digital inclusion, conducting a telephone survey to find out who was already able to use digital technology, had a smartphone, tablet, laptop and were wi-fi enabled and/or had the support to help them physically access an online programme." Joyce Cattanach, Development Officer.

Instead of face-to-face services in NHS-provided venues, HEL began to use RRR funding to organise small meet-ups in cafes and other venues with restricted numbers. East Lothian is a large rural area with limited public transport, so another use of the funding was paying for individual taxis to facilitate meet-ups within the regulations. Funding was also spent on refreshments because some people have much less disposable income than others and HEL didn't want people not going because they didn't have money to buy coffee or cakes.

"It's amazing how much you need to run taxis for that kind of thing. A lot of funding went on that, but what it facilitated was just remarkable and the feedback we got from people who had been stuck at home... the difference it made by making the most of what we were allowed to do was great." (Katy Lamb, Treasurer, Headway East Lothian)

Examples include paying for taxis so one woman could travel back and forth to the home-decoration store in order to decorate her living room, and another woman who would have been too anxious to get in taxis had they not been arranged through the project which reassured her about safety.

"If she'd booked it herself she would have cancelled it as she couldn't bear the risk. But when done safely through the project it lifted a cloud. She said she'd slept well for the first time in ages." (Katy Lamb, Treasurer, Headway East Lothian)

For HEL, a crucial element of the RRR funding is its flexibility and being trusted to know what is best for people. Support is very person-centred and whereas an audio book may be what one person needs to support their wellbeing this will not be suitable for everyone. The pandemic and uncertainty about changing restrictions served to make the need for flexible funding even more salient. This is illustrated perfectly by the fact that prior to the second national lockdown, HEL had organised an outing and picnic at the Alpaca Centre. In response to the new restrictions they changed their plans and organised a virtual Christmas party. *"RRR and other funds have enabled us to keep up with the changing needs and issues as they arose with changed restrictions and timescales." (Katy Lamb, Treasurer, Headway East Lothian)*

Long-term sustainability is a key area of concern among grant recipients, and it's worth noting that most RRR-funded projects which responded to the survey indicated that the work of their project is still going on.



The main way that the RRR fund has had a positive impact on longer-term sustainability is that a small amount of flexible funding can be enough to free up time for an organisation to do developmental planning. This was reflected by many of the survey respondents and focus group participants and highlighted as a key impact of the funding.

"The grant funded a helpline worker which freed up our services manager to facilitate changes in delivery which arose as a result of Covid-19" (Survey response).

Example: Clifftop Projects

Clifftop Projects is a community interest company based in West Dunbartonshire providing artistic activities. Having only established itself in April 2020, the project was funded £4,375 by the RRR fund to provide digital dance classes. The project's Artistic Director, Lottie Barker, credits the RRR fund with trusting her based on her previous work delivering dance classes as a freelancer and in the commercial sector rather than requiring her to have a proven track record in the third sector.

"Often with funding you have to prove it works before you do it. But here you were able to have the flexibility to try it out." (Lottie Barker, Artistic Director, Clifftop Projects)

The classes themselves have had a positive impact on people's mental health. Digital delivery has led to more engagement since people do not have to travel to attend classes, which can be a barrier for some. Clifftop Projects has connected with a local autistic society group and other local groups, increasing engagement further. The project wouldn't have been able to do this without something to offer, so flexibility helped.

Furthermore, the funding has had a positive impact organisationally. The RRR fund was one of the first pieces of funding Clifftop Projects had received and led to funding from other organisations to continue the same projects, including a Creative Scotland grant. This, combined with increased bookings from other organisations, has led to longer-term financial security. Lottie successfully applied to the Scottish Government's Resilience funding, which enabled her to bring in an administrator and assistant facilitator. This has helped her step back from day-to-day work to concentrate on organisational planning, which she didn't have time to do before.

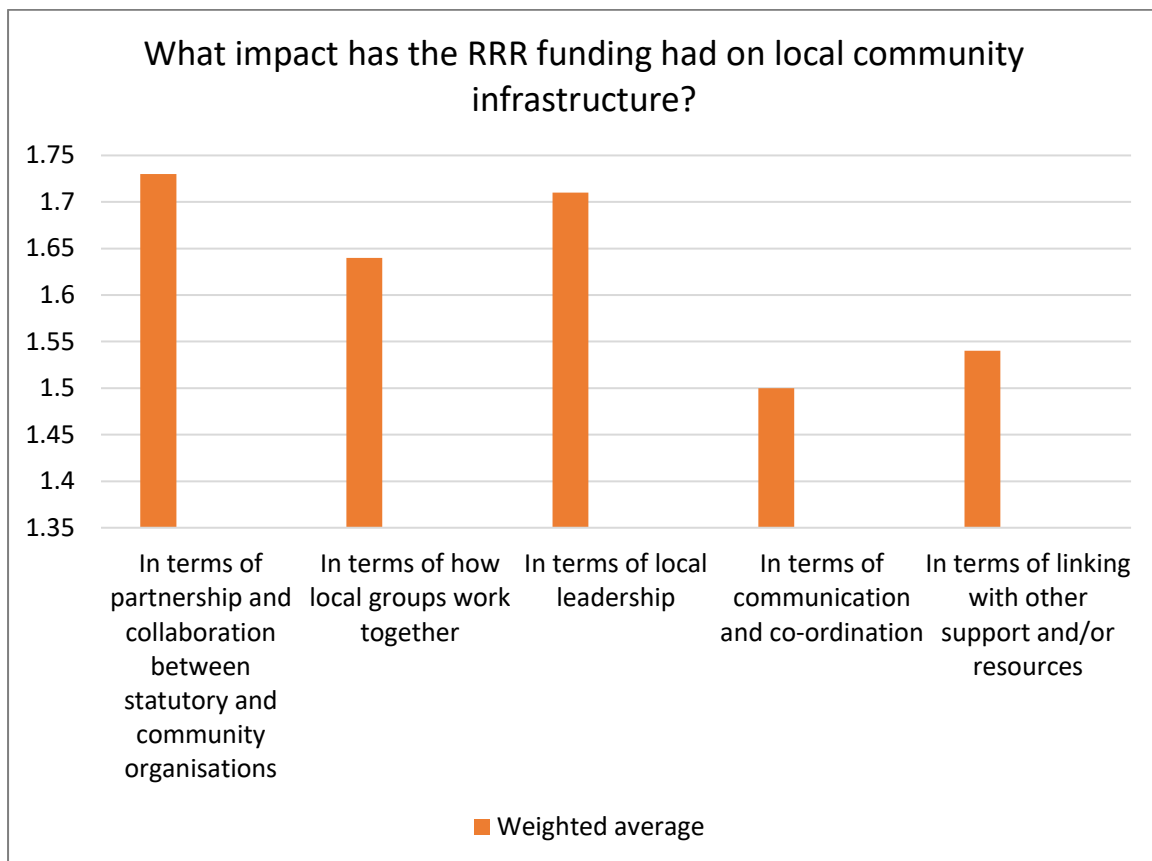
"Our organisation has grown exponentially - people have wanted more projects to bring them closer together both through the pandemic and now as we emerge out of it."

Impact on community infrastructure

One of the key developments apparent through the Covid-19 pandemic has been the increase in collaboration and cooperation amongst community organisations and their statutory and voluntary sector partners. This 'community infrastructure' is an important part of future resilience planning. We were keen to find out what the RRR Fund recipients felt about it and what impact (if any) they felt the funding had on this.

The survey showed the funding had a positive impact on local community infrastructure. More than half of respondents indicated the funding they had

received had a strong or medium impact on infrastructure in a range of ways. The chart below shows that the greatest impact has been on local leadership and collaboration (both between sectors and within the community sector). Communication, coordination and linking with other support and resources were not rated as strongly as other statements, but the impact has still largely been seen as 'strong' or 'medium'.



Community collaboration

Comments in our survey and focus group discussions explored the impact on community infrastructure in more detail. Examples of how voluntary and community organisations have collaborated well together include:

- Larger community 'anchor' organisations distribute funding locally to smaller organisations and share use of buildings and other resources.
- Although sometimes 'messy' to begin with, food distribution soon settled down with impressive levels of communication and coordination between the organisations.
- Referral of community members between different voluntary and community organisations to meet needs by the most appropriate organisation.

- A recognition that all different kinds of community groups and organisations have a part to play - sports clubs were mentioned particularly in relation to, not only providing physical activity opportunities when restrictions allowed, but also their willingness to provide their facilities for other purposes such as food distribution, vaccination, etc. during the pandemic.
- Rapidly moving communication and service delivery online has increased opportunities for collaborative working. The RRR fund has helped many organisations get themselves set up with equipment and training.

Collaboration with statutory services

The picture was more mixed when it came to collaboration with statutory organisations and services. There was agreement that, in general, the agile and nimble third-sector and community-led response to the pandemic have raised the profile of voluntary and community organisations, and some felt that they were 'round the table' with statutory organisations to a degree they hadn't been before.

Another positive was the facilitation of networks by statutory bodies such as local authorities, community planning and enterprise agencies (e.g. Highlands and Islands Enterprise). This was seen as helpful in sharing ideas, knowing what was happening, where gaps in provision might be etc. Again, being able to do this online was seen as being particularly helpful.

However, other participants in our research were frustrated by the slow and sometimes unhelpful response of statutory organisations such as local authorities. Specific concerns raised included:

- Being prevented from opening up buildings by local authorities, especially when the local authority owned these.
- An unsupportive funding culture (locally rather than nationally) which doesn't encourage local partnership and is rigid rather than flexible.
- Policies of reducing funding to voluntary and community sectors, cutting vital services and selling off vital community assets. General agreement that this is the wrong time to be doing this, if ever there was a right time.

Example: Fresh Start

Fresh Start is an Edinburgh-based charity helping people who have been homeless to establish themselves in their new home. They received £5,000 from the RRR fund to support their Covid-19 response. This included purchasing supplies in order to sustain their core service provision of starter packs to those moving on from homelessness. They also used the funding to help stock a community pantry to address food poverty in North Edinburgh.

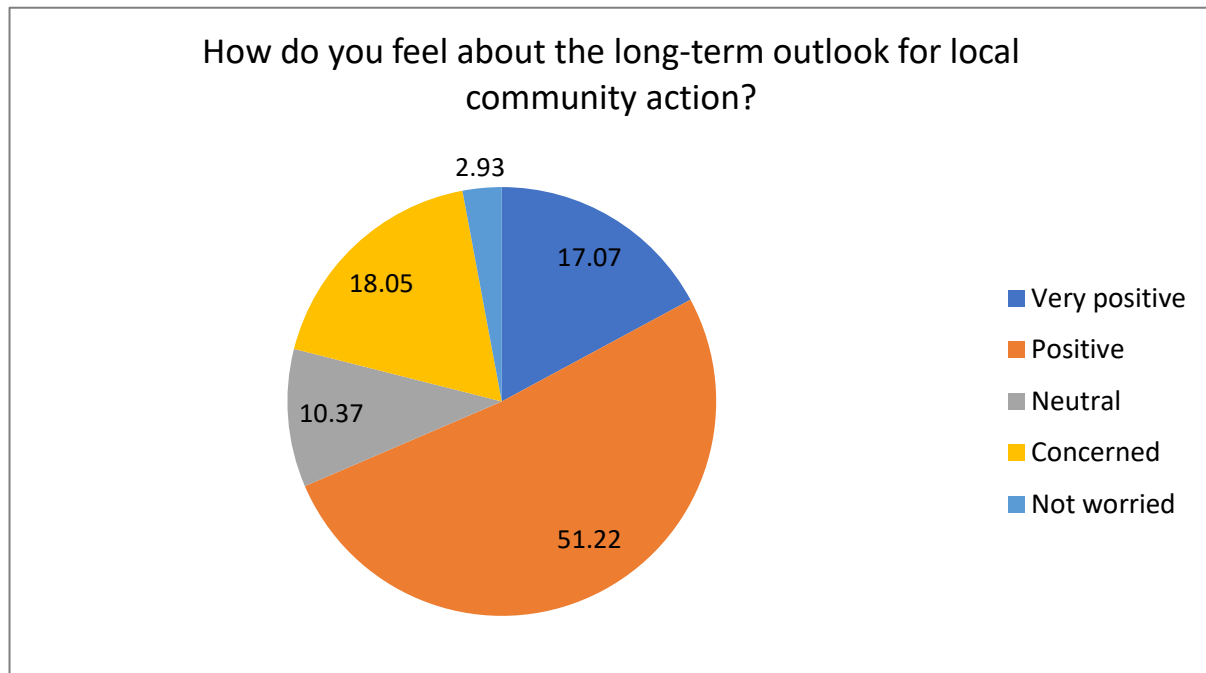
The funding has helped Fresh Start contribute to a healthy community infrastructure in North Edinburgh, some of which predates Covid-19. For instance, the starter pack service is delivered in partnership with the Bethany Trust. Partnership has become stronger during the pandemic, and the new community pantry is playing a key role in tackling food poverty in North Edinburgh. There is now a thriving network of three community pantries, run by North Edinburgh Arts and Pilton Community Health Project as well as the one provided by Fresh Start.

"Partnerships have been super charged in the last year which is having a very positive impact on service delivery and ensuring resources and impacts are maximised. People have been energised to a common purpose and organisations have left aside some of their silo mentality to work together." (Heather Norris, Senior Trusts and Grants Fundraiser)

Fresh Start's view is that there is a way to go for some of the structures to respond to this mood. An example is that, although Fresh Start has experienced a great willingness to work in partnership, most funders and funding processes are not geared up to respond to partnership applications. Applications are often limited to a maximum amount whether or not they are made in partnership with others, so it is often in each organisation's interests to apply separately.

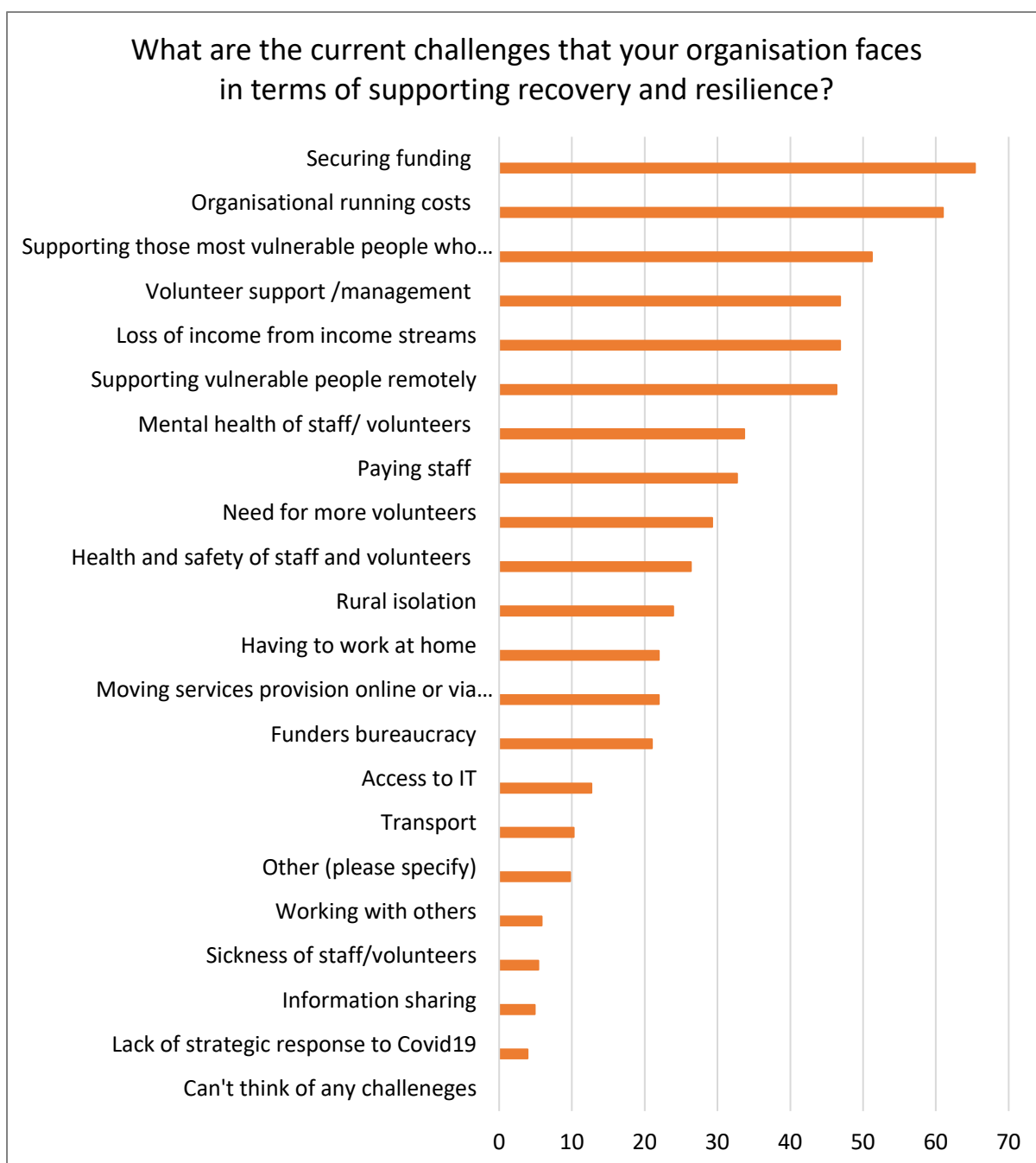
Challenges and Opportunities

Here we explore respondents' views about the challenges and opportunities which have emerged during the pandemic. There was a particular focus on how people felt about the longer-term prospects for their communities. People largely feel positive (51.2%) or very positive (16.8%). However, a significant minority (18.2%) are concerned about the longer-term outlook for community action.



Challenges

We then explored what people felt were the key challenges in developing community action and resilience into the future. The table below shows that the most frequently cited challenges are 'securing funding', and 'running costs' (both more than 60%). 'Supporting vulnerable people who aren't online', 'loss of income from income streams', 'volunteer support' and 'supporting people remotely' are all around the 50% mark.



Some of the findings reinforce the view that local infrastructure, leadership and partnership has been positive in most areas. 'Working with others', 'info sharing' and lack of strategic response' are all identified as challenges by a small minority (around 10%). Around 10% selected 'other', with 5 of the comments being about the difficulty of understanding and following the range of guidance on Covid-19.

Focus group participants reinforced these messages and highlighted the key challenges of sustaining the efforts established during the pandemic, continuing to

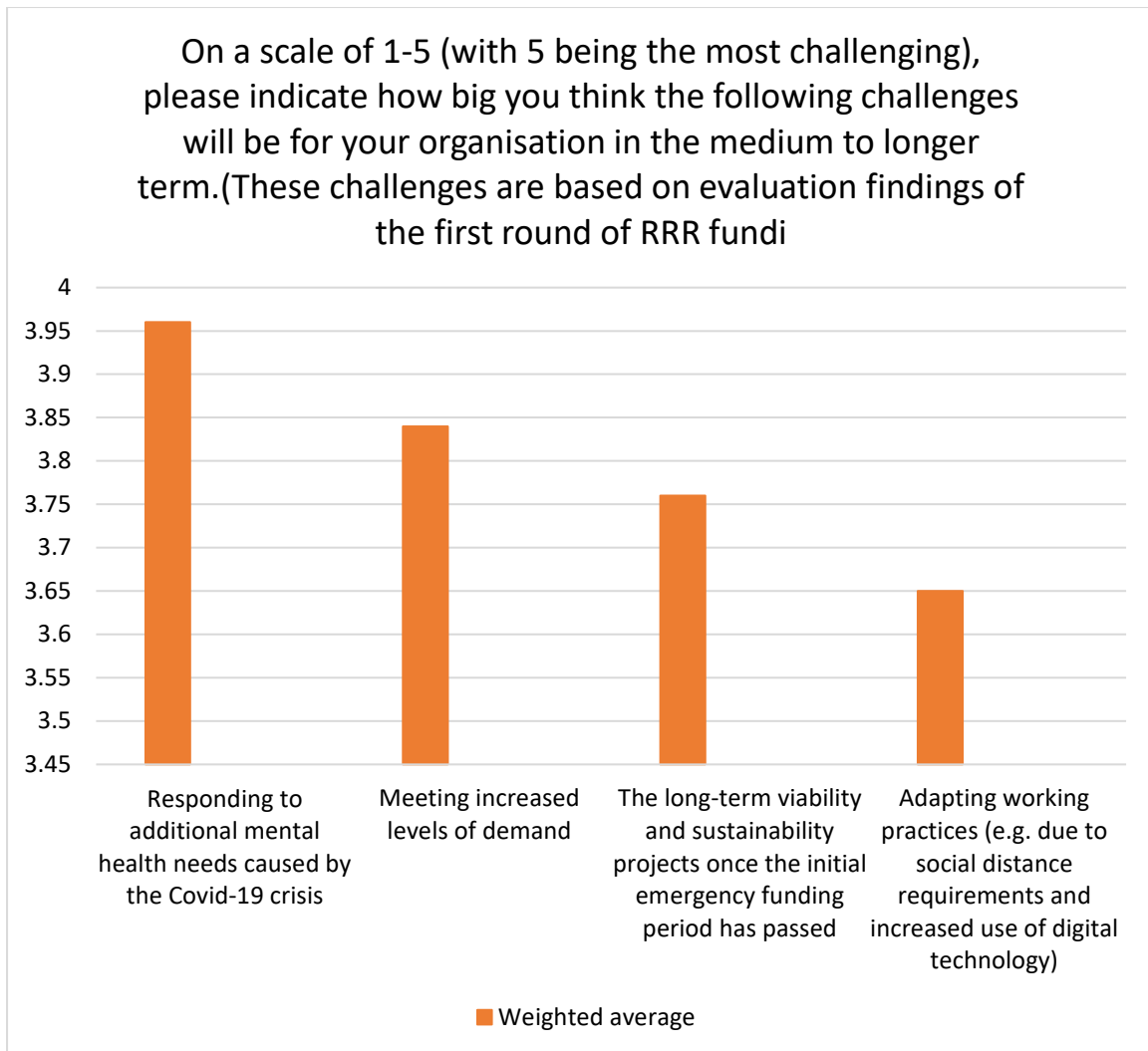
support volunteers, and securing stable funding, which will allow them to plan ahead with more confidence.

Challenges for Organisations

We then re-visited the main challenges for the organisations identified in the first phase of the RRR funding. These challenges were seen as being:

- meeting increased levels of demand
- responding to additional mental health needs
- adapting working practices
- long-term viability and sustainability of projects

The table below shows that all four challenges were rated 4 or 5 by most respondents. Long-term viability received the most polarised ratings, suggesting that many projects are concerned about this while a smaller number feel relatively secure. This question attracted a lot of additional comments, many reinforcing the concern about financial sustainability. Other challenges listed included finding suitable premises and sustaining a high volunteering spirit.

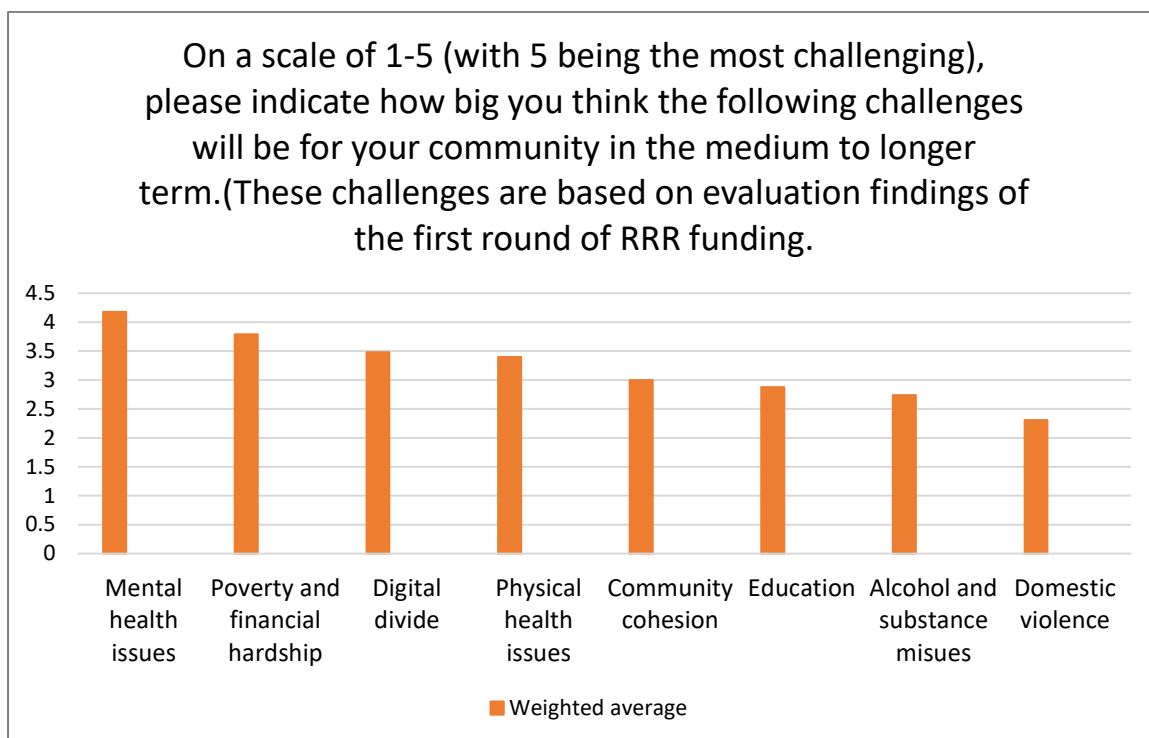


Challenges for Communities

We were also interested in the challenges for communities and re-visited the main challenges for communities that were identified in the first phase of the RRR funding. These challenges were seen as being:

- poverty and financial hardship
- mental health issues
- digital divide
- domestic violence
- community cohesion
- physical health issues
- alcohol and substance misuse
- education

The table below shows that respondents see mental health as the most significant long-term challenge for communities, followed by poverty, financial hardship, and the digital divide.



This question again attracted a lot of comments. The most frequent comments mentioned social isolation and the difficulty of people reconnecting as we emerge out of lockdown. Issues relating to poverty came up along with employment, transport, climate change, digital exclusion and housing.

"We may be able to offer some face-to-face groups in the near future. However, the need for our support continues to be very high" (Survey response).

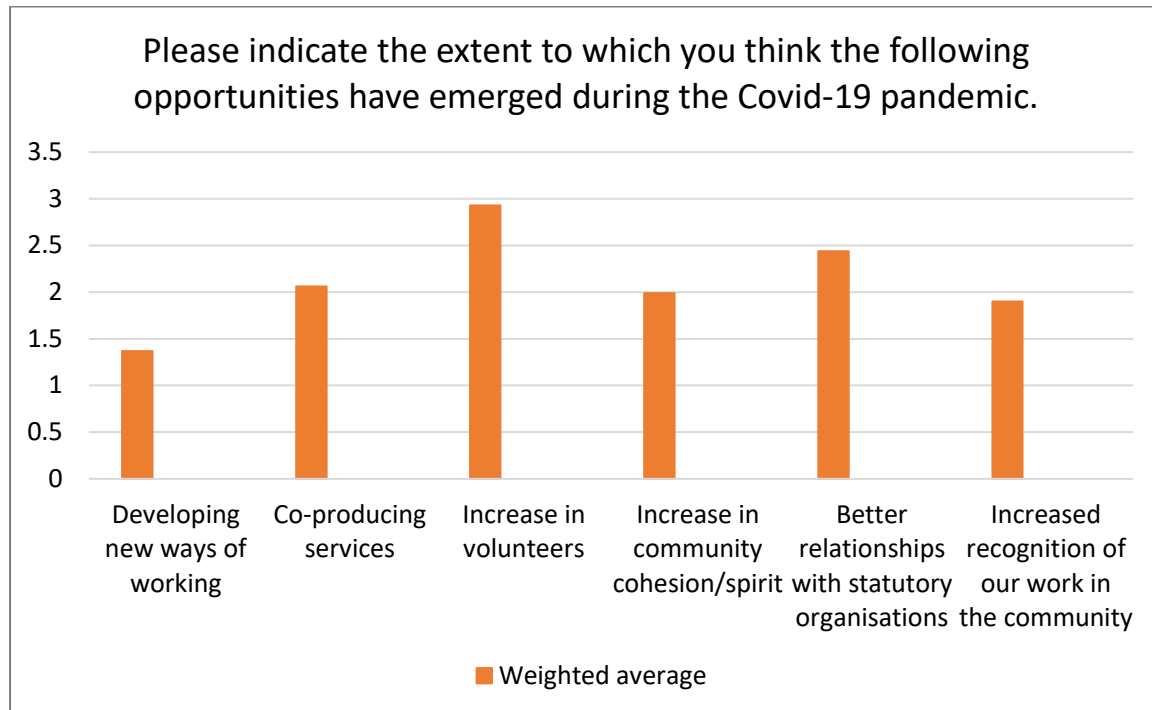
"The effects are still being felt by vulnerable individuals, and the need for food support continues regardless of restrictions being lifted." (Survey response)

"Needs have changed. If anything, there are greater demands and more serious needs." (Survey response)

Opportunities

When exploring the opportunities that have arisen during the pandemic, we examined key areas that have emerged over the past year, highlighted through our networks, and how the grantees consider them when looking ahead. The respondents clearly identified opportunities arising from an increase in volunteers and better relationships with statutory organisations. However, there was a fairly strong agreement that co-producing services, an increase in community cohesion/spirit, and increased recognition of their work in the community

represented significant opportunities to develop and sustain their activities and services. On an organisational level, the development of new ways of working was also seen to be important.



Comments in the survey included a range of other suggestions, such as 'community relations', 'opportunities to re-think lifestyles around ecological sustainability', 'increase in future partnership working', and 'better knowledge of the community's needs 'strong relationships within the organisation'.

"We have been sourcing and distributing digital equipment to those who are digitally deprived in communities. The pandemic has highlighted the benefits of digital equipment in communication, support, research and identifying areas of support - financial, emotional and general support - throughout the lockdowns" (Survey response).

Focus group participants also emphasised how the RRR funding had acted as a catalyst to help them to plan ahead and take the time to be more developmental. The importance of being able to come together with other local groups to take a more strategic approach to community development was also mentioned. In many instances, the benefits of collaboration between groups and organisations were seen as being positive building blocks for the future.

Example: Whitburn and District Community Development Trust

Whitburn and District Community Development Trust (Whitburn CDT) in West Lothian used an RRR grant of £3,360 to help continue to deliver a vital Community Fridge and Larder service. The service tackles food poverty and insecurity by providing dignified access to fresh and nutritious food. It has helped reduce food poverty and hunger in the community and surrounding environs during the Covid-19 pandemic.

"The strongest impact was meeting the needs of not only isolated but also vulnerable people. This was achieved through both the provision of our drop-in fridge and larder provision and our weekday 2-course pre-cooked meals service we deliver to approximately 60 vulnerable and, in some cases, isolated residents."
(Bernard James Murphy, Volunteer Director and Treasurer, Whitburn and District Community Development Trust)

The RRR-funded project enabled Whitburn CDT to extend the contract of their Community Fridge Coordinator. This gave the organisation breathing space to continue to explore opportunities for longer-term funding. They have now successfully secured further funding for the Community Fridge and Larder service provision until the end of March 2022. Whitburn CDT is continuing to work towards securing ongoing funding beyond then.

Although not directly due to the RRR funding, Whitburn CDT has been at the heart of the local response in partnership with other organisations. Their Community Development Worker has helped Whitburn CDT take a lead role working closely with statutory and community organisations and local businesses. Along the way, Whitburn CDT has recruited over 50 volunteers to assist deliver services.

As an organisation, they feel confident about the longer-term outlook for community action, viewing the community response to the pandemic as a potential foundation to the longer-term outlook, providing achievements to date are built on.

Concluding comments/observations

The combined evaluation of Phase 1, 2 and 3 of RRR has allowed us to observe the differences and similarities between what people were saying in the early stages of the pandemic and some 15 months later as we begin to emerge from restrictions to our daily lives.

There is one clear similarity between the response to the Phase 1 evaluation in April 2020 and the Phase 2/3 evaluation undertaken in April - June 2021, and this is the overwhelmingly positive response to our engagement with the grant recipients. The surveys that we have undertaken, which would normally attract a 10% response, have produced a 30% or better response and the engagement with interviews and focus group discussions has been extremely positive and enthusiastic. This is a clear indication of:

- the importance of the funding to the community projects and organisations involved
- the appreciation of how useful the funding has been and the straightforward and speedy processes for application and distribution
- how keen the grant recipients are to share their learning about what has worked and what has got in the way of their efforts to support vulnerable people and communities during and after the pandemic

There are some differences now in the issues and challenges that the grant recipients are facing, which are largely due to the constantly changing and complex situation over the past 12-15 months, but in many ways, the key challenges still remain. Secure funding, capacity to respond and plan, and the development of strong collaborations are all fundamental aspects of the community sector's role in emergency response, recovery and renewal.



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