

Section 5

# During Covid-19

## Scottish Government and Infrastructure Organisations' Response



## **Contents**

Key findings.....	3
5.1 Scottish Government's resilience partnership structure and support .....	5
5.2 Scotland's voluntary sector resilience response .....	7
5.3 The role of infrastructure organisations during COVID-19 .....	10
5.4 Coordination and collaboration of infrastructure organisations .....	14
5.5 The 'Scotland Cares' Campaign.....	19
5.6 Scottish Government funding provision.....	30

## **Key findings**

**Resilience partnership structures and support** – the voluntary sector's involvement in Scottish resilience planning and operational support was enhanced through:

- Expanding membership of the Voluntary Sector Resilience Partnership (VSRP)
- Setting up of the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Advisory Group
- In partnership with the National Emergencies Trust, Foundation Scotland launched the 'Response, Recovery and Resilience Fund' to distribute publicly and privately donated funds in Scotland.
- Establishment of the National Volunteering Co-ordination Hub to provide volunteers to support the COVID response programmes, wherever needed across the country.

**Resilience response of VCS** – during the pandemic the effectiveness of the resilience response was rated highly by 64% of infrastructure organisations, which was due to good communication, coordination of partners, effective partnership working and shared learning <sup>1</sup> Suggested enhancements include:

- More effective engagement of the third sector – especially TSIs
- Increased focus on community response, addressing long-term societal challenges
- Resilience structures and plans to encompass community needs
- Recognising and supporting the mutual aid response.

**Coordination and collaboration of infrastructure organisations** – local coordination was rated highly by infrastructure organisations: <sup>1</sup>

- 75% rated coordination as 'excellent' or 'good' between TSIs and local authorities
- The equivalent figure for coordination with other partners locally was 79%.

However, 44% of respondents stated that there has been 'limited' or 'no' coordination between their organisation and national partners. Going forward, it will be important to build on the positive examples of coordination and collaboration triggered by COVID-19, embedding these new relationships across all local authority areas

**Support provided by infrastructure organisations** – support included the registration of volunteer sign-ups; the matching of volunteers to opportunities; provision of guidance and information; funding assistance and advice; and setting up new services, programmes or groups. They also provided support outside formal volunteering:<sup>1</sup>

- 88% of infrastructure organisations supported mutual aid groups
- 69% supported informal volunteering.

**'Scotland Cares' campaign** –this national campaign's success in generating 60,000+ volunteer sign-ups could not be matched with the requirement for formal volunteering roles. Sixty-one percent of VIOs surveyed were aware of the campaign, but only 5% engaged volunteers from it.<sup>1</sup> Evidence from the c. 35,000 volunteers signed up via the Volunteer Scotland portal highlighted an efficient cascade to local authority areas and active engagement by TSIs and local authorities in attempting to register the sign-ups and facilitating their access to volunteering opportunities.

However, given the demand-supply imbalance there was difficulty in managing the expectations of volunteer sign-ups, and the campaign also created substantial administrative work for Volunteer Scotland and the TSI Scotland Network. There are further lessons which should help inform the design and timing of future interventions of this nature.

**Funding** - the Scottish Government provided £350m of funding was invested in communities including significant third sector funds, a proportion of which has supported volunteering, either directly or indirectly.

The previous sections examined Scotland's response during the course of the pandemic from the perspective of the volunteer response ([Section 3](#)) and the Volunteer Involving Organisation (VIO) response ([Section 4](#)). Section 5 now examines the Scottish Government and infrastructure organisations' response. It focuses on three aspects: the resilience response during COVID-19; the role and coordination of infrastructure organisations; and Scottish Government-led support through Scotland Cares and funding provision. It is structured into six sub-sections:

- Section 5.1 – Scottish Government's resilience partnership structure and support
- Section 5.2 – Scotland's voluntary sector resilience response
- Section 5.3 – Role of infrastructure organisations during COVID-19
- Section 5.4 – Coordination and collaboration of infrastructure organisations
- Section 5.5 – 'Scotland Cares' campaign
- Section 5.6 – Scottish Government funding provision

Two main sources of evidence have been drawn upon in Section 5:

- Four interviews with representatives of the Scottish Government and SCVO.
- The Scottish Government's report: 'Scottish Third Sector Perspectives on Volunteering during COVID-19', which analyses the views of both infrastructure organisations and VIOs. <sup>1</sup>

'Infrastructure organisations' can operate at the national, regional or local levels, their key distinguishing feature being their responsibility for leadership and coordination of support in the voluntary sector's response to COVID-19. This includes organisations such as SCVO, Volunteer Scotland, local authorities, Third Sector Interfaces, Health and Social Care Partnerships, and umbrella organisations networking across the sector.

The methodology for the MVA study would have benefited from a wider programme of interviews, including the views of key stakeholder groups such as funders, umbrella organisations and national bodies relevant to areas such as community development. Therefore, this research limitation must be considered in the assessment of the evidence and the conclusions reached in Section 5. The objective is to further enhance the findings and implications arising from this research through its critical review by partners involved in the development of Scotland's Volunteering Action Plan.

In the Scottish Government survey the infrastructure organisations' questionnaire had 52 responses, mainly from TSIs and local authorities: <sup>1</sup>

- 28 TSIs
- 11 Local authorities
- 5 other public sector organisations
- 5 other intermediaries
- 3 Health and Social Care Partnerships

Selected evidence is also drawn from the Scottish Government's VIO survey of which there were 278 respondents. <sup>1</sup>

## **5.1 Scottish Government's resilience partnership structure and support**

### **5.1.1 Utilising the existing resilience partnership infrastructure**

The Scottish Government Resilient Communities Team provided important insights on the role undertaken by the Voluntary Sector Resilience Partnership (VSRP) during the COVID-19 response as well as other established Voluntary Sector resilience groups in the Resilience Partnership areas across Scotland (see Figure 5.1.1).

- VSRP met every couple of months throughout the pandemic to discuss and address all the emerging Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) issues and concerns, such as relevant COVID guidance, PPE funding availability, vaccination access, etc.
- It also discussed emerging areas such as VCS involvement in COP 26, and housing Afghanistan refugees in Scotland's communities.

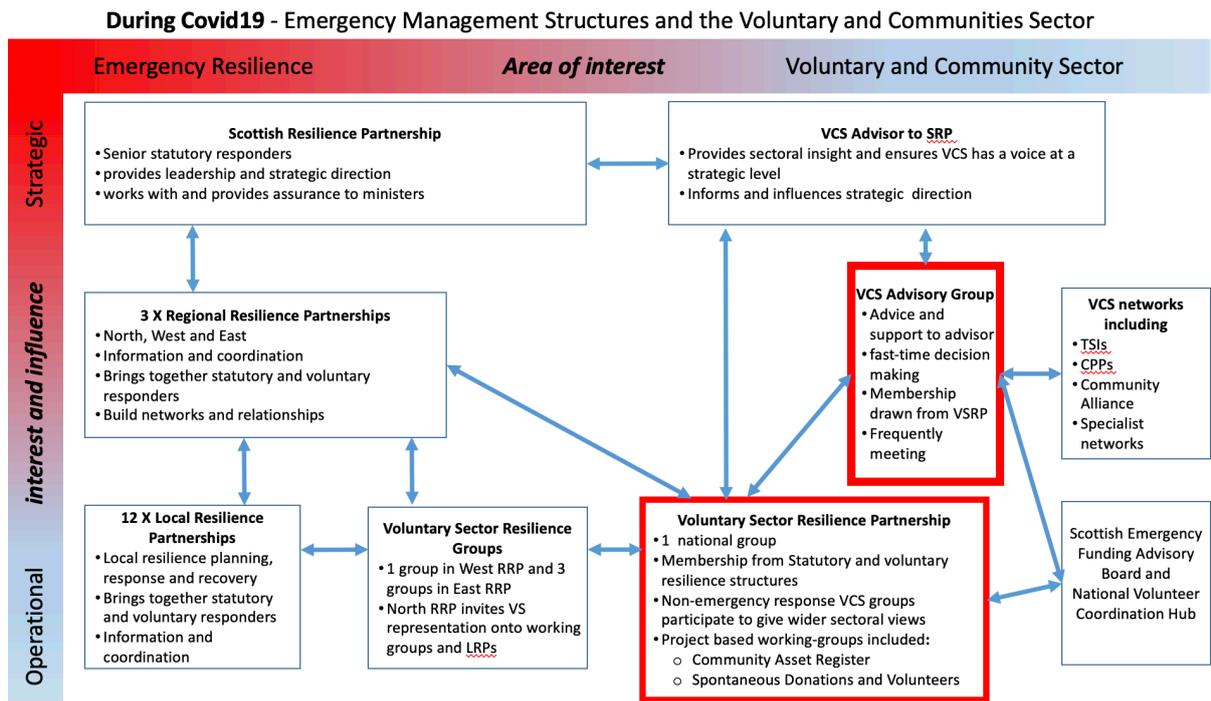
Hence, all the relationships that Scottish Government had through that group were very valuable; the discussion and intelligence shared at VSRP was also both informative and instructive.

### **5.1.2 Development of the resilience partnership infrastructure and support**

During COVID-19 a number of initiatives and changes were undertaken to enhance the voluntary sector's involvement in Scottish resilience planning and their delivery of operational and funding support.

**Expanding membership of the Voluntary Sector Resilience Partnership (VSRP)** – prior to COVID-19 the Scottish Government Resilient Communities Team acknowledged that the TSIs and one or two other third sector bodies, such as Volunteer Scotland, were not represented on the VSRP. While work was in progress to expand the membership prior to COVID-19, this had not been fully completed. During the early stages of the pandemic the team worked to ensure that representation on the group was widened.

**Figure 5.1.1 – Resilience structure in Scotland during COVID-19**



Source: Scottish Government Resilient Communities Team

**Setting up the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Advisory Group** – the Voluntary Sector Resilience Partnership (VSRP) identified the need for a more agile group to provide quick time advice, insights and act as a sounding board for the VCS advisor to the Scottish Resilience Partnership on issues including emergency resilience gaps, capabilities and priorities. This led to the creation of the VCS Advisory Group: see Figure 5.1.1, which shows how this group fits into the overall Scottish resilience partnership infrastructure.

The VSRP met four times a year during the height of COVID-19 in 2020, whereas the VCS Advisory Group met at least weekly. It provided real-time intelligence on issues relating to what was happening on the ground, such as food supply and PPE. This intelligence helped to identify areas that needed to be addressed and identified the people that have the relevant experience and knowledge in these areas, who could then come together separately to discuss the issues and help develop solutions.

**Donated funding** – prior to COVID-19 the Scottish Government Resilient Communities Team had undertaken a review of the options on how to ensure that spontaneous donated funding to a national or regional event, such as the terrorist attacks at London Bridge and the Manchester Arena in England, were collected and allocated to where they were needed most. The team considered both a bespoke Scottish system to deal with spontaneous funding or working with the National Emergencies Trust, which had experience in dealing with terrorist events in England. While working with the National Emergencies Trust was agreed as the best option by VSRP, the agreements were not finalised at the outbreak of COVID-19. Therefore, interim arrangements had to be put in place quickly to deal with the spontaneous funding received in response to the pandemic.

In partnership with the National Emergencies Trust, Foundation Scotland launched the 'Response, Recovery and Resilience Fund' at the end of March 2020.<sup>3</sup> By February 2021 they had distributed £7 million in grants of up to £5,000 to 1,400 charities and community groups the length and breadth of Scotland.

As part of those arrangements, to support consideration and decision making around appropriate, fair and equitable distribution of donated funds, the Scottish Emergencies Funding Advisory Board (SEFAB) was established, with representatives from a range of organisations; some with funding experience, such as SCDC and the Corra Foundation, and many from the VSRP with relevant experience such as Red Cross, SCVO and Foundation Scotland.

**Further development of the Ready Scotland Website** – the extant Ready Scotland resources at the outbreak of COVID-19, specifically those relevant to the VCS in Scotland described in [section 2.3](#) such as 'Building Resilient Communities', were utilised during COVID-19. However, the website was also used to promote key messages from voluntary sector organisations, and it provided additional resources on key societal challenges, for example mental health resources. There was also active use of the Ready Scotland twitter account.

**Creation of the National Voluntary Sector Coordination (NVC) Hub** – the hub was set up to provide a centralised resource for any areas that needed prompt volunteer support over and above that provided through the existing structures.<sup>4</sup> For example, providing volunteer support for the vaccination and testing programs, wherever sufficient volunteer support was not available, contributing over 50,000 hours. The Scottish Government Resilient Communities Team added messaging to Government press releases providing details of the NVC hub as well as linking into existing resilience partnership structures.

In order to raise awareness, Scottish Government Resilient Communities Team wrote to Health Boards, Local Authorities and Health and Social Care Partnerships providing details of how to access volunteers from the NVC hub. The Team also promoted the hub by adding messaging to Scottish Government press releases and linking into existing resilience partnership structures.

## **5.2 Scotland's voluntary sector resilience response**

### **5.2.1 Resilience response during COVID-19**

Notwithstanding the variable engagement of TSIs in resilience structures and planning arrangements pre COVID-19 (see [section 2.3](#)), when infrastructure organisations were asked to assess the effectiveness of the resilience response in the area where they operate, the feedback was extremely positive. 'Resilience response' refers to the response by resilience partnerships and responders in support of the needs and the voluntary and community sector.

Of the 44 organisations that were able to respond to this open qualitative question (i.e. the respondent had the required knowledge/experience of the resilience response in their area) 28 (64% of respondents) rated the effectiveness of the response as 'very effective', 'effective', 'excellent' or 'good'.

### Positive comments on the resilience response

"The Ready Scotland website was/is very helpful."

"Very effective response, groups mobilised quickly and were supported by council, NHS and TSI"

"The existing Resilience Partnership met regularly with excellent Partner buy-in and representation across the various sectors. This led to a co-ordinated and effective response to the pandemic."

"We have a strong community planning partnership in our area – and the resilience response, such as we've seen during the COVID-19 crisis, saw the Council, the Health & Social Care Partnership, local private sector organisations, and the Third Sector network of community groups shape the local response to a national crisis - often providing a 'safe place' for those vulnerable individuals and families most at risk."

"Very effective. Daily strategic meetings, local needs and guidance informing direction of travel and plans. Effective communication. Feedback from all stakeholders sought at key stages."

"The Resilience response during COVID was very effective. Communication and sharing learning were exceptional."

The features underpinning an effective resilience response were **good communication, coordination of partners, effective partnership working and shared learning**.

In the interpretation of this positive resilience response there are a number of important qualifications:

- Firstly, the extent to which the effectiveness of the resilience response was due to resilience planning and support pre-COVID varied. In some cases it was the local organisations getting together to tackle the crisis outside the Local Resilience Partnerships. In others it was led or supported by the response of mutual aid groups outside formal resilience structures; and there was also an example of a sectoral response to the crisis within the befriending sector.
- Secondly, there is a sense that some organisations were having to 'start from scratch', learn real-time and at pace, the implication being that they were not drawing upon previous resilience planning, group work or training:

“Nothing in place locally to address a pandemic. But response was speedy and efficient.”

- Lastly, it is important to understand how ‘resilience’ success is defined. Interesting observations were made on the effectiveness of the ‘structural’ and immediate crisis response versus the challenges of addressing longer term societal challenges.

The evidence also showed that there is considerable variation across the different local authority/TSI areas in Scotland. Many are exemplars of good practice in terms of joined up partnership working, strong community engagement and very effective resilience responses – whereas for some others there were significant challenges.

### 5.2.2 How to improve the resilience response?

A range of resilience response issues were identified by infrastructure organisations that should be considered by the Scottish Government in its assessment of Scotland’s resilience response to COVID-19, and how its response could be enhanced for the handling of future crises: see Table 5.2.1. The overarching feedback from infrastructure organisations is the need to encompass the third sector and community needs more effectively in Scotland’s resilience response.

Their view was that there was too much of a focus on the statutory Category 1 and 2 responders with the result that the practical emergency needs were well handled, but the complex community and longer-term societal challenges less so. Their feedback also suggests a need for more effective involvement and integration of TSIs, community organisations and mutual aid groups in resilience planning structures and operational delivery at the local level.

**Table 5.2.1 – Infrastructure organisations’ feedback on the resilience response**

Theme	Feedback from infrastructure organisations
<p><b>More effective engagement of the third sector</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Although the resilience response was considered very effective, it could have been improved with more third sector inclusion at the outset. “Although we eventually were seen as full and effective partners in the Local Response Management Team structure, we were firstly overlooked and in fact turned away from a meeting as it was deemed ‘too early’ for our involvement.”</li> <li>• There is also evidence that some TSIs were not involved in the local resilience structures: “We were disappointed not to be involved in our local Resilience Partnership. It would appear there was a different approach across Scotland where some TSIs were heavily involved and others not involved at all.”</li> </ul>

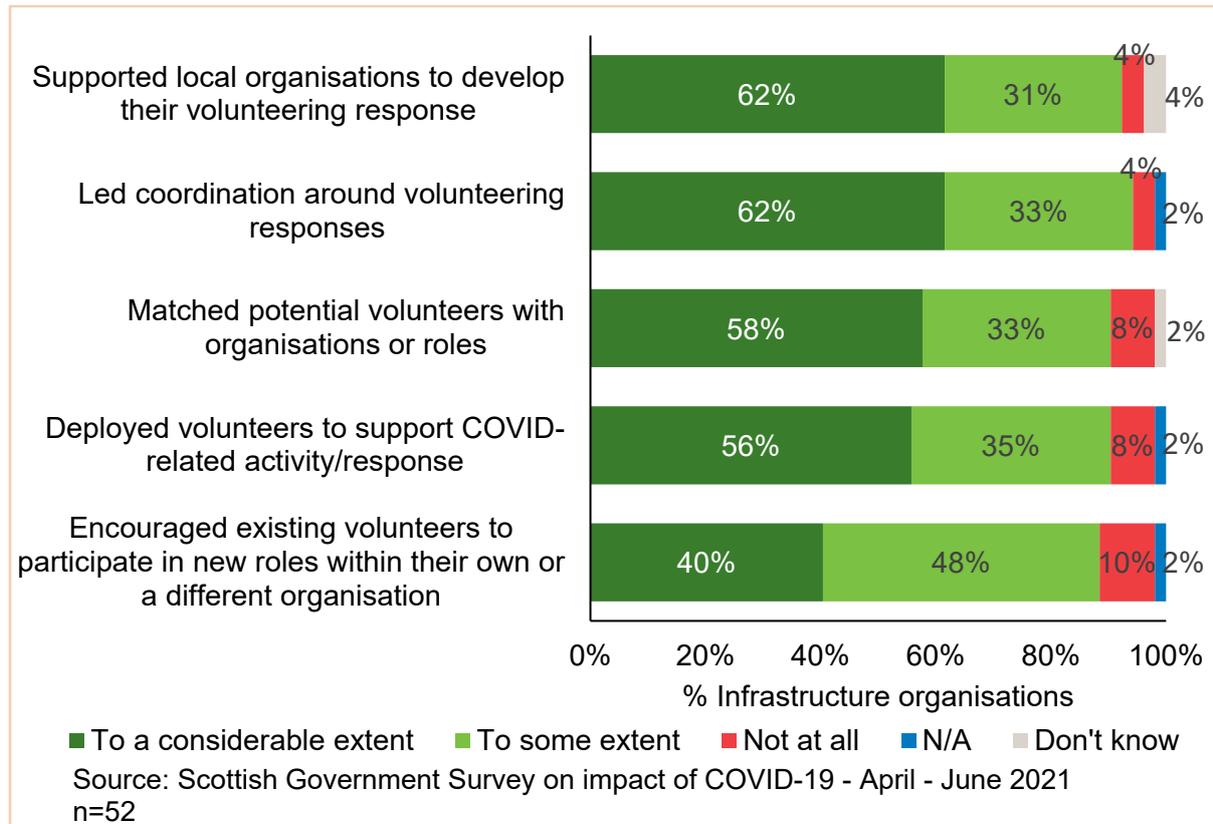
<p><b>Increased focus on community response and addressing long-term societal challenges</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The resilience response was effective at coordinating the 'structural' aspects of the pandemic - i.e., planning for hospital beds, vaccines, mortuary back-up procedures. However, at the beginning of the pandemic resilience was insufficiently linked to the community response. “We need to distinguish between resilience in the face of emergencies and resilience to chronic stresses and ongoing systemic challenges.”</li> <li>• The need for resilience groups to take ownership of volunteering as part of the local resilience response: “Local resilience partnerships contributed volunteers to local groups, but did not lead activity themselves as their primary focus is on environmental issues such as floods and extreme weather.”</li> </ul>
<p><b>Recognising and supporting mutual aid</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A key message from infrastructure organisations is the importance of recognising the contribution of mutual aid to Scotland’s resilience response, and to learn how to support and embed this approach more effectively for the management of future crises. “In all honesty it was the local community based volunteer group who were quickest to respond. Their ability to be flexible and able to make instant decisions made their response more effective than the statutory agencies. The local groups worked really well together and have continued their partnership beyond the lockdown. The Council was much slower to respond but were able to provide a lot more support once they had got over administrative hurdles.” “The mutual aid groups succeeded where formal structures... could not fully....However, those groups and volunteers need supporting, so resilience -- true resilience has not been embedded in this structure as well as it could have.”</li> </ul>

## **5.3 The role of infrastructure organisations during COVID-19**

### **5.3.1 Volunteering coordination and support**

The Scottish Government survey asked infrastructure organisations how they have helped support or coordinate the volunteering response in their area, or for the organisations they support.<sup>1</sup> Figure 5.3.1 shows that there was wide-ranging support provided by infrastructure organisations.

**Figure 5.3.1 - How has your organisation helped to support or coordinate the volunteering response to COVID-19 in your area (or for the organisations you support) (within Scotland)?**



Other areas of support were also highlighted by infrastructure organisations:

- **Production and dissemination of new guidance materials and resources –** examples include:
  - Guidance for mutual aid groups
  - Video for 'how to be a good neighbour'
  - Easy read guides on governance and volunteer management
  - Guidance for NHS Boards
  - Information on funding and sustainability
  - Guidance booklets and Q&A session on how to transition to digital /phone based delivery
  - Directory of Services about informal and formal groups providing services.
  - Tailored guidance for community resilience groups including Volunteer Agreement, Induction Checklist, Money Handling, Risk Assessment etc.
  - COVID-19 briefings for the sector

- **Setting up new services, programmes or groups** – examples include:
  - The formation of a Community Taskforce Volunteers Programme that facilitated meaningful engagement with those who had responded to the Scotland Cares Campaign.
  - The organisation of a 'Keep calm and co-ordinate group' which brought together public sector and local organisations in a collaborative response to the emergency. This resulted in the creation of 'The Community Hub', a single telephone number for local people, groups and organizations to call to offer help, ask for help or find out what was happening in their area.
  - The establishment of a volunteer registration on-line portal which allowed volunteers to register, be tasked with activities, have insurance and also proof of identity if challenged on movements during lockdown 1. This portal was used to recruit and deploy volunteers for the mass vaccination programme.
  - The TSI supported the HSCP and Council in the creation of 'Neighbourhood Hubs' to support those areas identified as volunteer 'cold-spots'.
  
- **Providing funding assistance and advice** – examples include:
  - Distribution of grants
  - Supporting organisations with sourcing funding and making funding applications
  - Distribution of vouchers in partnership with other organisations.

### 5.3.2 Support for mutual aid groups

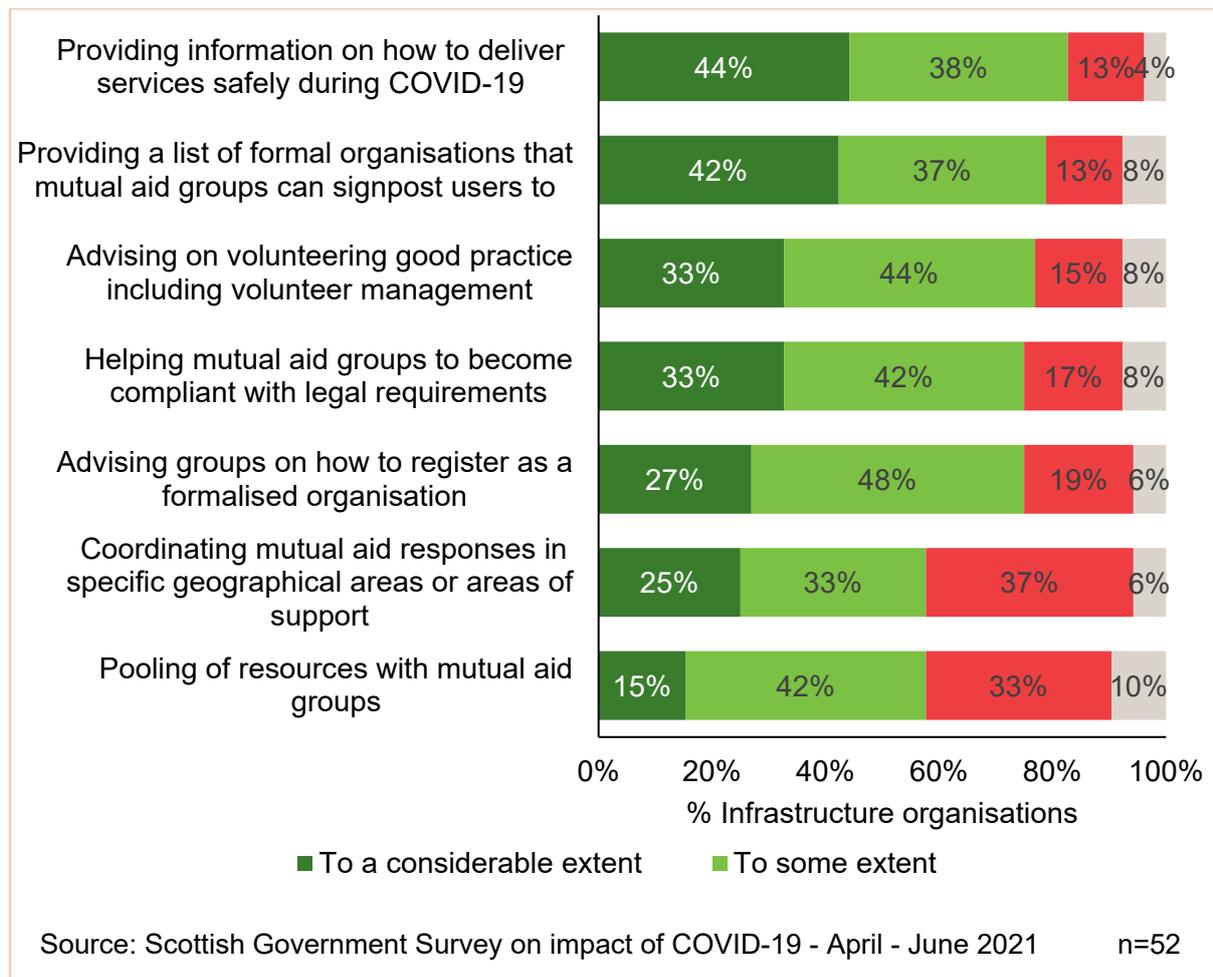
Eight-eight percent of infrastructure organisations have supported mutual aid groups in one or more ways. Figure 5.3.2 specifies the information, advice and support provided to these groups: formalisation of their organisation; governance and legal compliance; volunteer management; COVID-safe delivery of services; lists of formal organisations they can signpost to; and coordination of support geographically. Organisations provided examples of the type of support they provided: <sup>1</sup>

“Staff have been working tirelessly to support these new mutual aid groups to get the basic requirements in place including governing document, bank account, funding and volunteering best practice.”

“We have used social media to encourage new mutual aid groups to join our network and tried to encourage outside organisations including mutual aid groups to get support from ourselves or (our) TSI, etc.”

“We have supported mutual aid groups with volunteer management support, covid volunteering guidance, safer volunteering advice, and volunteer recruitment and support advice, and TSI partners have supported with funding and governance.”

**Figure 5.3 2 – Scottish infrastructure organisations' coordination and support of mutual aid groups**



### 5.3.3 Informal volunteering

Just over two-thirds of infrastructure organisations (69%) were involved in supporting informal volunteering.<sup>1</sup>The main forms of support included the provision of advice, support and guidance on how to support neighbours and how to volunteer safely – provided via websites and through social media.

Specific examples include:

- Creating ‘Being a Good Neighbour’ guide and guidance on how to carry out common tasks (dropping off food, prescriptions, walking dogs etc.) safely
- Providing guidance on confidentiality and health and safety issues
- Linking informal volunteers to mutual aid groups
- Volunteer Edinburgh - ‘Think Local, Act Local’: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l8zvLqhfeTs>
- Providing a link to the Ready Scotland website regarding helping neighbours
- Providing a helpline for residents looking for support, offering support or looking for help to safely support their neighbours.

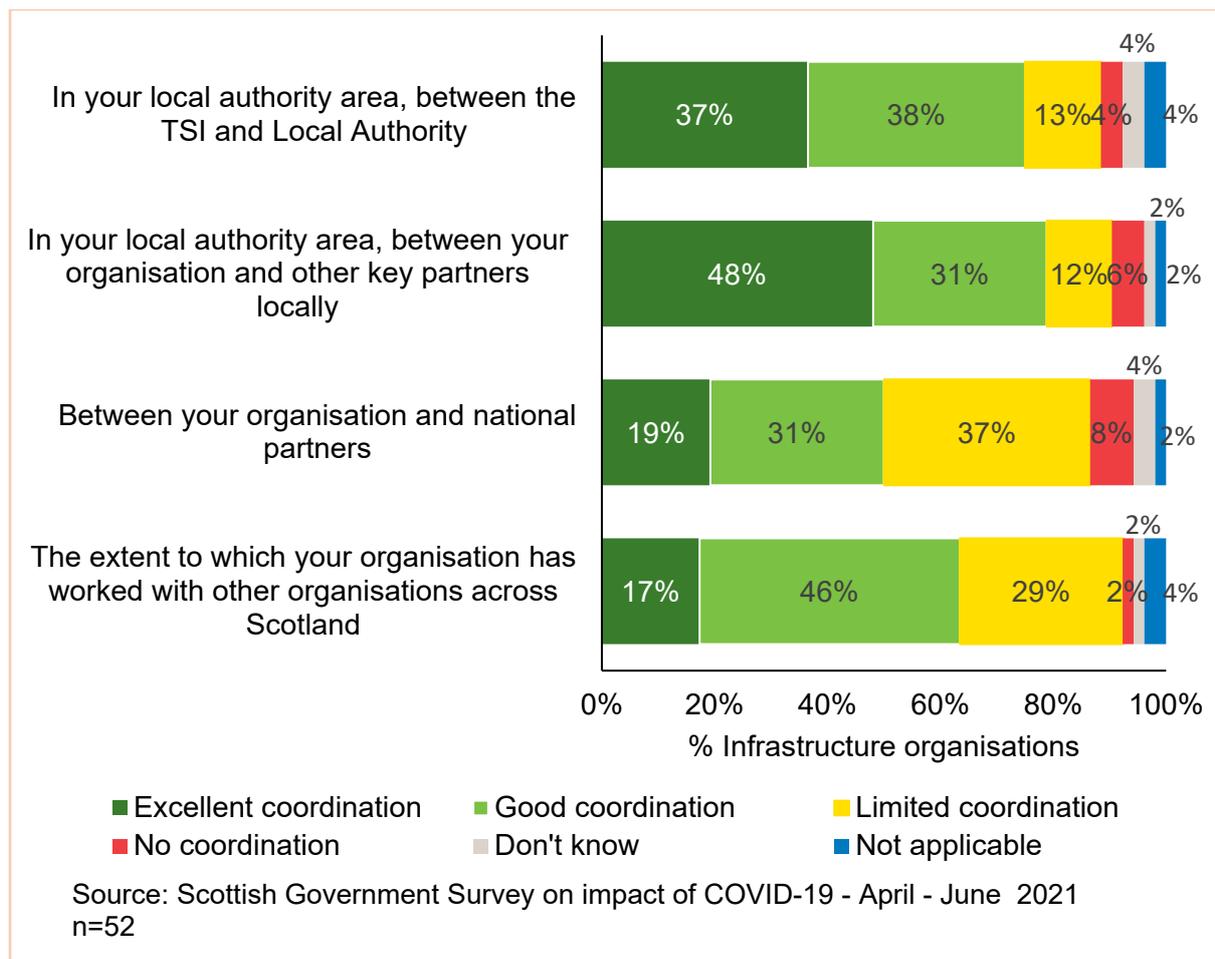
- Distribution of community postcards to encourage people to volunteer/be a good neighbour
- Supporting informal volunteering by working with local organisations, community councils, elected representatives and key community contacts

## 5.4 Coordination and collaboration of infrastructure organisations

The Scottish Government’s survey asked infrastructure organisations to rate the coordination of the volunteering response between key partners during COVID-19 – see Figure 5.4.1.<sup>1</sup> The majority of organisations rated the coordination as either ‘excellent’ or ‘good’ across the four categories. However, a key finding is that local coordination has been stronger than national-local coordination. The evidence also indicates that there is considerable scope for improvement with regard to the latter:

- 45% of respondents state that there has been ‘limited or no’ coordination between their organisation and national partners.
- 31% of respondents have had ‘limited or no’ working with other organisations across Scotland (i.e. outside their local area).

**Figure 5.4.1 Scottish infrastructure organisations’ rating of the coordination of the volunteering response between key partners during COVID-19**



VIOs were also asked to rate the wider coordination of the volunteering response between different organisations in the areas or sectors in which their organisation works. <sup>1</sup> Sixty percent rated the coordination as 'excellent' or 'good', with 40% assessing the coordination to be 'limited' or 'none'. (These figures exclude the 'not applicable' and 'don't know' responses which differs from the methodology in the Scottish Government survey. Volunteer Scotland have used this methodology to include only the respondents who had the required knowledge/experience on coordination between key partners). Like the infrastructure organisations' response, this evidence also indicates that there is considerable scope for improvement in the coordination of the volunteering response.

#### 5.4.1 What worked well in the coordination of the volunteer response?

The feedback from infrastructure organisations was extremely positive regarding the effectiveness of the coordination of the volunteer response, especially at the local level.<sup>1</sup> Respondents provided a rich evidence base about what worked with 'local coordination' and 'national coordination'.

**Local coordination** – the following themes were identified from the evidence:

- **Partner involvement** – there were numerous examples of effective partnership working with the most frequently cited organisations being the TSIs, the local authority and Health and Social Care Partnership, with Community Planning Partnerships and the NHS also being cited.

“The local coordination across (our) TSI, the local authority and the HSCP was excellent throughout the pandemic.”

However, the importance of community organisations embedded within local communities was also identified as important:

“Good relationships with key local organisations that strengthened during the response. Existence of key community anchor organisations in many of our communities.”

- **Leadership** – local collaboration was based on partners coming together to tackle a shared challenge with effective team working being at the centre. There was virtually no discussion of 'our organisation X was the key leadership body'. However, implicit within the evidence was the key role played by TSIs in collaborative working due to their volunteering knowledge and expertise and this was recognised by other partners:

“All partners worked really well together and recognised the lead role played by our TSI in supporting those in need across the local area”.

- **Strengthened partnership working** – a number of examples referenced the positive impact of COVID-19 in strengthening local partnership working during the pandemic, “strengthening a culture of working together across all stakeholders”. As one infrastructure organisation said: “What worked well was simply that all politics were put aside. The focus was on our local area and how we could all support them through the pandemic.”

#### Feedback on improved partnership working

“The pandemic really focuses partnership efforts to what really needed to be done and volunteers were at the heart of this. There is a renewed recognition of the roles and value of volunteers and what worked well was listening to and responding to feedback from volunteers and adapting approaches. One of the positives from Covid was that things had to be done differently showing that there are better ways to work together and learn together across the sectors. The response and recovery efforts really showed Community Planning in action - finding ways to work together across agencies and sectors to respond to and meet the needs of communities and the role of volunteers was highlighted and elevated and hopefully this will continue beyond the pandemic.”

- **Examples of local coordination** – there were numerous examples of ‘new ways of working’ including:
  - Weekly Zoom meetings and increased use of digital platforms more widely
  - Sharing intelligence
  - Creation of ‘locality’ hubs’
  - Setting up of a volunteering working group with key partners
  - Encouraging cross-charity working and resource sharing
  - Taking a person-centred approach to volunteer and client needs
  - Targeting support to high need groups/localities
  - Having a neighbourhood/community level focus – not local authority wide
  - Mobilising to support local COVID-19 outbreaks
  - Having a single point of contact with an overview of the needs of the area.
  - Supporting funding applications so equipment/devices could be obtained to support members.
- **Characteristics of local collaboration and coordination** – the following descriptors were commonly used in describing local coordination and partnership working:
  - Listening
  - Responsive (and fast)
  - Flexible
  - Person-centred
  - Local response
  - Cooperation
  - Coordination

**National coordination** – the evidence points to the different forms of coordination and support at the national level in the response to COVID-19. This highlights the importance of the TSI Scotland Network during the pandemic:

“The TSI Network met regularly on Zoom both nationally and in regional clusters.”

“Working with and support from the TSI network was invaluable during the pandemic. TSIs were able to co-ordinate our responses, share briefings and offer additional support.”

“Communication with other TSIs was excellent as we each learned from each other's experience and what worked best.”

Other examples of national coordination and support:

### **British Red Cross**

“The link to the Red Cross to promote covid related volunteering opportunities to their registered volunteers and vice versa, has worked well since lockdown in continuing to engage with non-traditional volunteers following lockdown in short term and new volunteering opportunities, such as new ‘Meet and Greet’ NHS roles.”

“The creation of the National Volunteering Coordination Hub for the vaccination programme is an excellent example of partnership working. Funded by Scottish Government, operated by British Red Cross and with key stakeholders round the table from the start.”

### **Youth Scotland**

“We attended regular meetings with the Youth Scotland network. This enabled us to share learning and inform Youth Scotland what was needed on the ground - increasing understanding and knowing this was informing National response.”

### **Disclosure Scotland**

“Disclosure Scotland's digital service meant we were able to get people volunteering much more quickly than we could have done under the paper system and this made a huge difference to the volunteer response.”

### **Volunteer Scotland**

“On a national level the support offered by Volunteer Scotland has been strong and we've been able to signpost many volunteer groups to training and resources that helped them quickly develop to ever-changing needs.”

### 5.4.2 What could have been improved in coordinating the volunteer response?

Feedback from the infrastructure organisations on what could have been improved focused on three key themes: Scotland Cares, better communication and partnership working, and local authority and TSI engagement.<sup>1</sup> A lot of the views expressed were 'problems experienced' rather than 'suggested improvements'. However, the former gives clear guidance on lessons learned and what not to do in future emergency responses and, in some areas, what needs to be maintained as good practice post-pandemic.

- **Scotland Cares Campaign** – 16 out of 36 responses focused on the problems created by the national campaign. This has been reported on separately in section 5.5.
- **Communications and partnership working** – notwithstanding the positive feedback on the coordination of the volunteer response locally, which was described earlier in this section, there were a handful of areas that experienced problems with their communication and partnership working. The following examples were cited:
  - A request for better communication between the Council, TSI and the local resilience groups
  - More formal links with community councils and volunteering organisations as 'signed-up members' of the local partnership
  - The lack of community anchor organisation(s) made coordination more difficult. The role of new mutual aid groups helped to fill such gaps.
  - "Better coordination and communication between national and local government and agencies, more decentralization of resource and decision making to enable local agencies to quickly make decisions and develop approaches to meet local needs to allow local volunteers to respond and be supported quickly."

#### Local authority and TSI relationship issues

"Less 'ownership' by the local authority and more of a partnership approach."

"Initial discussion between Volunteer Centre and local authority were to have a joint response to a local volunteer support phone line and matching of volunteers to local response groups, however, the local authority decided to keep this in-house due to their concerns regarding info sharing. From subsequent feedback, the response could have been improved by increased partnership coordination to ensure consistency in the volunteer response and avoid duplication of work."

The TSI would have liked to be more involved in the establishment and running of the volunteer hub. "It took far too long for us to be included and receive the data and information that we could have more effectively used."

The creation of the (volunteer response unit) .... unfortunately created an initial disconnect between the informal groups and the TSIs and the support for volunteering.

The problem of public sector colleagues being reassigned into volunteer management/coordination roles during COVID-19, but without the required skills or experience. This highlights the importance of mainstreaming volunteer management training into public sector management training.

- **Local authority and TSI engagement** – for seven local authority areas issues have been highlighted by TSIs relating to the structure and operational response in their area. This relates to a lack of inclusion for TSIs in local structures and systems, and the lack of a partnership philosophy.

The Scottish Government's survey of VIOs also identified problems in local and regional coordination:<sup>1</sup>

- The lack of effective coordination/support from a few of the local authorities was cited.
- Some VIOs had difficulties in knowing which organisations to contact and have received limited or no communication.
- The evidence suggests that the experience of VIOs varies quite markedly across Scotland, with some local authority areas demonstrating more effective coordination and support than others.

## **5.5 The 'Scotland Cares' Campaign**

Evidence on the Scotland Cares Campaign has been drawn from the following sources: the views of infrastructure organisations and VIOs from the Scottish Government survey;<sup>1</sup> and interviews with the Scottish Government and SCVO. The analysis has been structured under the following headings:

- Background to Scotland Cares
- Planning the campaign
- Implementation and management
- Impacts of the campaign
- Lessons learned
- Overall assessment

### **5.5.1 Background to the 'Campaign'**

On 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020 the Scottish Government launched its Scotland Cares Campaign which invited people to register their interest to volunteer via the Ready Scotland website. The objective was to provide one place for potential volunteers to go, to sign up, and to be redirected to local organisations so that if and when they were needed that need could be expressed and met locally.<sup>2</sup> People could sign up via Volunteer Scotland or British Red Cross links and these sign-ups were matched with local needs in a range of organisational settings. The Campaign was paused on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2020 because the supply of volunteers outstripped demand. Total volunteer sign-ups were over 60,000 (data sourced from the Scottish Government report): <sup>1</sup>

- 35,262 sign-ups to Volunteer Scotland to support charities and community groups
- 25,172 sign-ups to the British Red Cross to support public services.

Since that date there has been no requirement to re-start the Campaign given the sufficient supply of volunteers locally.

The evidence discussed below is focused on the Volunteer Scotland sign-up channel on the Ready Scotland website, not the British Red Cross channel. The Scottish Government survey questions on Scotland Cares were focused on the role of TSIs and local authorities in handling the sign-ups from Volunteer Scotland channel. Also, there was no interview with the British Red Cross as part of this study.

### 5.5.2 Planning Scotland Cares

**The rationale for a campaign** – based on feedback from interviews with representatives of the Scottish Government the case for a national volunteer campaign was underpinned by the following factors:

- The opportunity to harness people's willingness to help tackle the COVID-19 crisis. It was seen as important to provide a centrally managed sign-up process for all those who wanted to support the COVID-19 response. The goal was to provide a structured route for volunteers, rather than them approaching service providers directly. The model was also seen as a way of managing volunteers' expectations.
- The opportunity to develop a 'bank' of registered volunteers who could be drawn upon flexibly throughout the pandemic as more formal volunteering opportunities opened up. So, the objective was always more than meeting the immediate crisis needs during the first lockdown.
- The strong political pressure on the Scottish Government to take action following the initial 750,000 volunteer sign-ups to the NHS call for a 'Volunteer Army' in England in March 2020. One must be careful not to adopt a revisionist position based on hindsight. There were a lot of unknowns at the time and there were strong pressures on Government to support the voluntary sector's COVID-19 response, and to act promptly:

SCVO also indicated that the Scottish Government was committed to the campaign and to activating it quickly: "It was something that the Government decided was going to happen." "It wasn't really a political option to do nothing."

**Appraising the business case** – it is not known whether the Scottish Government appraised the Scotland Cares proposal and, if so, who was consulted and what aspects it covered. However, it is clear that senior officers had identified the potential problem of an over-supply of volunteers. It always realised that opportunities to volunteer formally would be limited in the short term, especially during the first lockdown. The objective was to build up a reserve of volunteers who could be drawn upon flexibly to help address new needs as the pandemic progressed.

**Consultation with the third sector** – there was limited engagement with Volunteer Scotland and TSIs on the need for the campaign, or to help inform its design. TSI feedback from the Scottish Government survey identified this lack of consultation: <sup>1</sup>

“Asking TSIs if the mass call-out was actually required before releasing such a message. I don't think we would have required it in (our TSI).”

“.....more notice of this actually happening would have ensured each TSI was geared up and ready and that we could have circulated our own communications that were relevant to the need in our local areas.”

“.....I think that lack of communication and involvement of TSIs caused chaos on all levels.”

However, Scottish Government and partners needed to respond quickly, and they also were dealing with a situation that no one had ever experienced before. These factors of pace and uncertainty contributed to less consultation than would apply under normal business conditions.

**Designing the sign-up system** – in designing the system there was an initial proposal to set up a completely new portal and registration mechanism, but feedback internally from within Scottish Government and externally from SCVO rejected this approach in favour of using the Ready Scotland website and the cascade of the sign-ups to the TSIs and local authorities.

“And, so ultimately, (the mechanism) did channel, the right people to the right places.”  
(SCVO)

### 5.5.3 Management of the ‘Scotland Cares’ sign-ups

**Receipt of volunteer sign-ups locally** – from the Scottish Government survey, 90% of TSIs and local authorities confirmed that they had received the sign-up information from Volunteer Scotland, with 10% responding ‘no’ or ‘don't know’.<sup>1</sup> However, from reviewing the qualitative data on Scotland Cares it is likely that the ‘no’ and ‘don't know’ response categories result from infrastructure organisations which were not handling the sign-ups for their local area – specifically local authorities. Therefore the ‘no’ response could just mean that they didn't receive the information, but their partner TSI did. Also, Volunteer Scotland's records show that 100% of volunteer sign-ups were allocated to the 32 local authority areas.

**Feedback on the sign-up distribution process** – Scottish Government believed that a key strength of Scotland Cares was the efficient process for cascading national sign-ups to the local level, with Volunteer Scotland distributing the contact information to relevant contacts in the TSIs and local authorities. Some of the infrastructure organisations were also positive about the sharing of the sign-up information: <sup>1</sup>

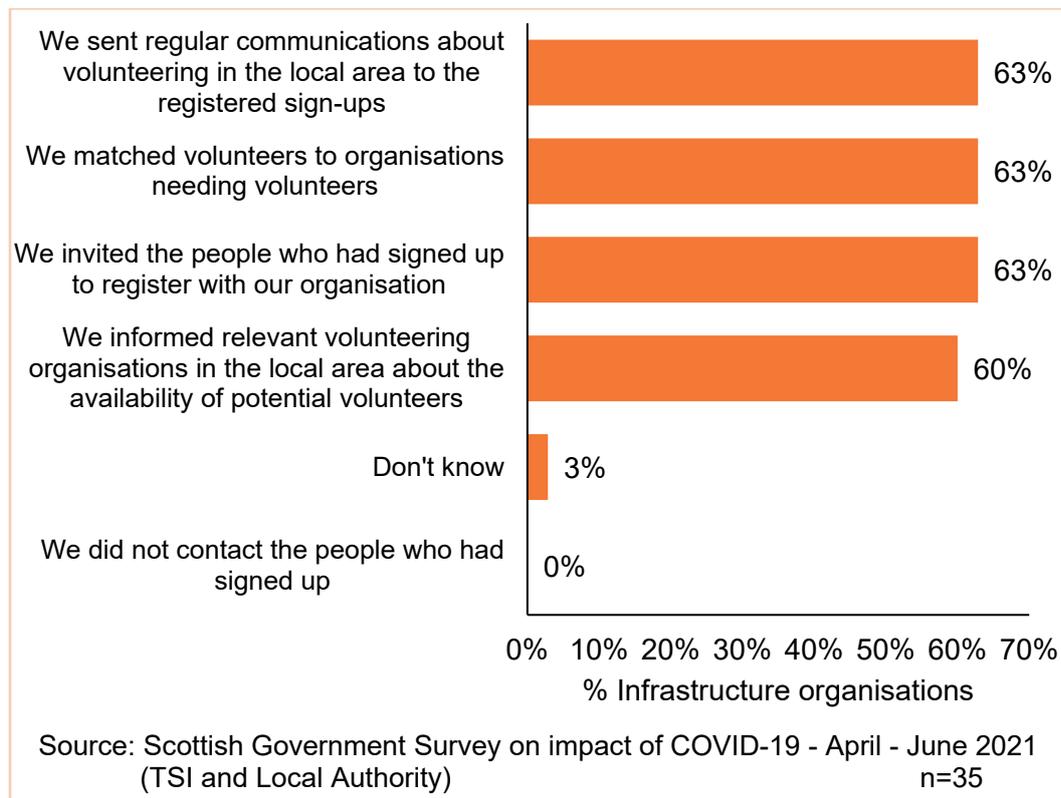
“It was useful to receive the spreadsheets from Volunteer Scotland weekly, and with all the details in one place we were able to easily track who we needed to contact and when.”

**Management of the sign-ups locally** – the Scottish Government survey revealed that of the 35 infrastructure organisations which confirmed they had received the sign-up data from Volunteer Scotland, all of them contacted the people who had signed up with the possible exception of one ‘don’t know’. <sup>1</sup> The contact details from the Scotland Cares sign-ups were used in a variety of ways by the infrastructure organisations: see figure 5.5.1.

A number of infrastructure organisations did not know the proportion of sign-ups they registered and the proportion that then went on to volunteer. As a consequence, this data has been excluded in the analysis in Table 5.5.1. (As the ‘don’t knows’ are excluded there is a methodology difference to the Scottish Government survey. Volunteer Scotland has used this methodology to include only the respondents who had the required knowledge and experience on Scotland Cares). The key findings are:

- A significant proportion of Scotland Cares sign-ups were not registered locally. Forty-six percent of infrastructure organisations registered 50% or less of the sign-ups they received from Scotland Cares. A possible contributory factor for local registration being significantly less than 100% is the two-step process, whereby those who had signed up to Scotland Cares were then being asked to register locally. This may have dissuaded those who were asked to register locally, especially as we know a significant proportion signed up with both the British Red Cross and Volunteer Scotland.
- For the volunteers that were registered locally there was a very low conversion rate to actual volunteer roles. For 76% of infrastructure organisations, 25% or less of their registered sign-ups went on to volunteer. This low proportion is likely to have been significantly influenced by the lack of volunteering opportunities locally – see further discussion below.

**Figure 5.5.1 TSI and Local Authority use of contact details from the Scotland Cares campaign**



**Table 5.5.1 – Proportion of ‘Scotland Cares’ volunteer sign-ups registered locally by infrastructure organisations and the proportion that volunteered**

Proportions (that signed up / volunteered)	Registration of sign-ups % of infrastructure organisations (n = 26)	Sign-ups that volunteered % of infrastructure organisations (n = 21)
0%	8%	9%
1 – 25%	19%	67%
26 – 50%	19%	5%
51 – 75%	15%	5%
> 75%	38%	14%

**Note:** The ‘not applicable’ and ‘don’t know’ responses have been excluded from this analysis, which is a methodology difference to the Scottish Government results. Volunteer Scotland has used this methodology to include only the respondents who had the required knowledge and experience on Scotland Cares.

Source: Scottish Government - Coronavirus (COVID-19) volunteering - third sector perspectives: survey report'; January 2022

### 5.5.4 Impact of Scotland Cares

#### Positive impacts

There were consistent views on the positive aspects of Scotland Cares from infrastructure organisations, the Scottish Government and SCVO, including:

- **Number of sign-ups** – the campaign was seen as a real positive in terms the 60,000 sign-ups as a reflection of the desire from the people of Scotland to help out. It showed the huge appetite to volunteer and participate.
- **Increased volunteering profile** – the campaign raised the awareness of volunteering through mainstream media, which would be difficult to replicate under normal non-crisis conditions.
- **Harnessing the desire to help** – the campaign helped to build and capture the community response.

#### Negative impacts

Notwithstanding these positive impacts there was consensus that the key limitation of Scotland Cares was its inability to deliver volunteering roles for the vast majority of the volunteer sign-ups – an outcome that was mirrored in England. This view was most strongly expressed by the TSIs, which were at the centre of volunteer management and coordination locally. The problem centred on volunteer supply significantly outstripping the demand for volunteers: there were far too many volunteer sign-ups for the number of volunteering opportunities available at that time. Feedback from infrastructure organisations describes the problem and the adverse impacts resulting: <sup>1</sup>

“It energised people to volunteer, which would have been good if we needed them but as it turned out we really only needed a few.”

(the request for help from the public) “.....left many people angry or upset that they were not assigned any tasks, this led to frustration often directed at staff.”

“There seemed to be a mismatch between people coming forward and being matched up with volunteering opportunities, many people who came forward received very little communication and were left feeling unvalued.”

“A great many volunteers were disappointed at not being offered a role and potentially discouraged their future volunteering.”

“We received over a year's worth of volunteers in one go - there was no way we were going to be able to place more than a fraction of them. This resulted in a lot of disappointed volunteers, who couldn't understand why the Government was encouraging them to volunteer, but we were telling them we couldn't place them. This resulted in reputational damage to our organisation, and may mean that people are less likely to volunteer in future.”

SCVO feedback mirrored that of the infrastructure organisations:

“But the weakness was that there wasn't anything for those volunteers to do and it was reputationally risky for everyone. That it was inevitable lots of people would sign up, but not have anything to do in the short term, and that that may have created a sense of frustration.” (SCVO)

The consequence of this demand-supply imbalance was a series of actual and potential negative impacts:

- **The small proportion of volunteer sign-ups that actually volunteered:** evidence from the Scottish Government survey includes: <sup>1</sup>
  - Just 17% of infrastructure organisations agreed that ‘most people who wanted to found volunteering opportunities’; 48% agreed that there were ‘significantly more volunteers than it was possible to place; and 23% said that there were ‘somewhat’ more volunteers than they could place.
  - 76% of infrastructure organisations only managed to convert between 0 – 25% of sign-ups into volunteer roles (see Table 5.5.1 above)
  - Two out of three of the 278 responding VIOs (61%) were aware of the Scotland Cares campaign, but only 5% engaged volunteers through the initiative. The main reason cited for this was that they did not need volunteers.
- **Potential adverse impacts on volunteering:** due to unfulfilled volunteer aspirations which could affect their interest in volunteering in the future.
- **Potential reputational damage:** due to the infrastructure organisations being associated with the failure to deliver volunteer roles for the Scotland Cares sign-ups. The TSIs were particularly exposed to this risk.
- **The management and administrative burden of the Campaign:** Communicating with the sign-ups, registering them and then trying to manage expectations placed a burden on TSIs and partners. Feedback from infrastructure organisations included: <sup>1</sup>

“We did receive a large number of volunteers and contacting them all was a major challenge but we did contact each and every one.”

“...the request for volunteers was too broad and the process of registering was somewhat onerous.”

“.....but it ended up in a lot of people registering nationally as well as locally so created extra work to remove duplications.”

"Options for data management weren't presented to TSIs and it was understood that each TSI should manage the data as best they could, while also adhering to GDPR and their existing procedures."

### 5.5.5 Lessons learned from Scotland Cares

Given the research limitations of the stakeholder consultations relevant to Scotland Cares one must caution against being too prescriptive in drawing up 'lessons learned'. Only four one-to-one stakeholder consultations were conducted with the Scottish Government and SCVO. Hence, the evidence presented is strong in relation to the views of the infrastructure organisations, but more limited regarding Scottish Government, national bodies and funders.

Notwithstanding this evidence gap, it is important to reflect on the views expressed and to put forward what can best be termed 'provisional lessons learned' to help inform future initiatives of this nature.

**Understanding the context** – in assessing Scotland Cares and its performance, Scottish Government stressed the importance of understanding the context and situation during March-May 2020 at the height of the first lockdown. There were major uncertainties over how long the pandemic would last, its unfolding impact, how to balance disease control protocols with support interventions, etc. It is easy to be wise in hindsight, but 'in the moment' the Scottish Government and partners had to make decisions and at pace across a myriad of issues, only one of which was Scotland Cares. Therefore, the business protocols and procedures that would normally be followed in steady state non-crisis times do not necessarily apply when in the midst of an unprecedented global crisis. This 'context' needs to be taken into account when reflecting on the lessons learned below.

**Consultation pre-launch** – as discussed in section 5.5.2 there appears to have been limited consultation with the Government-funded bodies responsible for volunteering in Scotland: Volunteer Scotland and the TSI Scotland Network. Both have specific contributions for a campaign of this nature:

- Volunteer Scotland has a potentially important role in the design and administration of national volunteering programmes.
- TSI Scotland Network has a critical role in assessing volunteering needs at a local level, in advising on the merits of a national campaign, and in informing its design and roll-out.

**Getting the timing right** – as discussed in section 5.5.2 there was a lot of pressure on the Scottish Government to act quickly in the launch of its campaign. However, the feedback from the TSIs and SCVO suggests that giving more time to planning the details of the campaign and giving advance notice to the TSIs would have been beneficial:

TSIs wanted to be sighted in advance on the details of the campaign:

“....far more advance notice regarding when we as TSIs would receive the information, how and what information would be shared,....”<sup>1</sup> (TSI)

SCVO also believed that there would have been significant benefits if Scotland Cares had been delayed giving time to plan the details; in particular being clear about:

“...the specific needs” that it should address. For example, being more realistic about the limited opportunities to volunteer and thinking creatively to: “...find ways to channel what was going to be the inevitable level of interest into a few things that people could have done.... (for example) from home.” (SCVO)

**Collaboration post-launch** – the Scottish Government acknowledged how important collaboration was between the Government and the third sector. The way partners came together to help develop and deliver the Scotland Cares campaign was seen as a real strength - the bridging between Government and the third sector. It was particularly helpful within the context of the COVID-19 challenges: their scale, the lack of information, the risks and uncertainties, and the importance of having to learn real-time as the pandemic unfolded. Scottish Government’s trust in third sector representatives was critical in informing and guiding the rollout and management of the Scotland Cares campaign.

**Managing volunteers’ expectations:** as already discussed in section 5.5.4 it was recognised that the Scotland Cares campaign was likely to be heavily over-subscribed, so the management of volunteers’ expectations was going to be critical. The Ready Scotland website and correspondence from Scottish Government to volunteers all emphasised the stay-at-home message; the fact that there may not be a role in the immediate time frame, but that they may be in the future. This included a number of letters to volunteers and voluntary organisations direct from Aileen Campbell, former Secretary for Communities and Local Government.

“Not all volunteers who have signed up will be needed immediately, but I’d like to stress that volunteers will be critical in our efforts to support and rebuild our communities and many of those who have not yet been called on to help will play a vital role over the weeks and months to come.”  
(Aileen Campbell, former Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government)<sup>2</sup>

SCVO and Volunteer Scotland also tried to manage volunteer expectations through the online sign-up process by making it clear that they may not be used immediately or that there might not be any volunteer opportunities at all for them: “So everything was trying to manage expectations” (SCVO). Also, once signed up, SCVO, Volunteer Scotland, the TSIs and partners tried to find ways to keep the volunteers engaged, and also to maintain their interest in volunteering in the future: for example, the RadioV podcasts delivered by Volunteer Scotland and the linkage to national volunteering initiatives and support such as mental health training.<sup>6</sup>

However, the evidence shows that there were significant problems in fulfilling volunteers' expectations. For the Scottish Government this was one of the most important lessons learned from the campaign. Despite frequent messaging to the volunteer sign-ups that they might not be needed now, but might be at a future date, this did not seem to get through as effectively as it should have done.

The infrastructure organisations also confirmed the problems they faced in managing the demand for volunteering: <sup>1</sup>

".....we could have done a much better job to ensure the campaign set out more appropriate expectations at the outset: asking people to register in case they were needed at short notice rather than raising everyone's expectations that charities were crying out for people's help there and then."

"An improvement could have been that we "advertised" specific needs when they were identified."

**System design to minimise bureaucracy** – the two-tier system of national sign-ups with Volunteer Scotland and local registration was not efficient for either the TSIs or the volunteer sign-ups. It resulted in duplication and increased workload. There was also duplication and coordination issues with the British Red Cross element of Scotland Cares:

"Most volunteers signed up to both Red Cross and SCVO, were passed by Red Cross to Local Authority and then to us when we already had their details! TSIs were left to sort out the mess and apologise to potential volunteers for their experience." (TSI) <sup>1</sup>

The sharing of volunteering opportunities with the British Red Cross was problematic, especially during the first lockdown:

".....there was some uncertainty over the Red Cross side of things until we organised a meeting with them during second lockdown - we have now established a link that works well, but we missed out on promoting local volunteering opportunities to those who registered to be Red Cross volunteers in the first lockdown." (TSI) <sup>1</sup>

**Don't forget your existing volunteers** – alongside the management and onboarding of new volunteers from Scotland Cares the Scottish Government identified how important it was to acknowledge the contribution of the ongoing volunteering effort across Scotland; all those volunteers who were active before the pandemic but were now supporting society's needs during the pandemic.

### 5.5.6 Overall assessment of Scotland Cares

The Scottish Government's Scotland Cares campaign was developed within a context of strong political pressure for the public sector to take action following the initial 750,000 sign-ups to the NHS call for a 'Volunteer Army' in England in March 2020. There were also major uncertainties over how long the pandemic would last, its unfolding impact, and how to balance disease control protocols with support interventions, etc. This made the planning and delivery of the campaign a challenging exercise. It should also be recognised that the Scotland Cares campaign message included being neighbourly and contributing locally to your community through informal volunteering; not just focused on the formal volunteering sign-up process through the Ready Scotland website.

Scotland Cares achieved over 60,000 sign-ups within a month, and this demonstrated the willingness of Scotland's people to help in tackling the national crisis. It also helped to raise the profile of volunteering.

However, there were three key linked problems resulting from the Scotland Cares campaign:

- The demand-supply imbalance due to the relatively small number of immediately available formal volunteering opportunities compared to the large number of sign-ups, which meant that most applicants did not get the chance to volunteer. This may also have had negative impacts on applicants' perceptions of volunteering and the organisations associated with the Scotland Cares campaign.
- The heavy workload involved in the administration of the Scotland Cares sign-up and registration process administered by Volunteer Scotland nationally, and the 32 TSIs locally across Scotland, often with the support of their local authority. This workload also hit the TSIs in May-June 2020, when they were already incredibly busy.
- The 'window of interest' from volunteer sign-ups was limited, especially after the first lockdown when people came off furlough and started to return to work. Volunteer Scotland's engagement with the sign-ups identified a significant waning of interest.

Based on the evidence reviewed from the different partners consulted it is also quite clear that the potential demand-supply imbalance problem was known in advance of the campaign launch. Therefore, the Scottish Government and partners did their best to try and communicate to the volunteer sign-ups that not everyone would be needed immediately, and it was quite likely their services would be called on in the future.

However, was there sufficient information available during April 2020 when the campaign was being developed, and was it reflected on to make the right call on the launch of Scotland Cares – in that format and at that time? The Scottish Government appears to have been committed to the launch of its campaign, but was it challenged – internally and externally?

As described by SCVO the only way to have impacted the Government's decision or timing of its campaign would have been if:

“...we (infrastructure partners) had been much stronger and saying more volunteers aren't needed just now...but that's a really hard message. And actually, we didn't. Do we have the collective strength to say that? And if we had said that. What would have been the impact on the volunteering infrastructure to say (this) in a time of crisis? Like we don't need volunteers. It was a lose-lose.” (SCVO)

## **5.6 Scottish Government funding provision**

Funding support for the third sector was a critical component of the Scottish Government's response to COVID-19 and £350m was invested in communities including significant third sector funds – see mapping tool of community funds: [Community Funding Mapping \(arcgis.com\)](https://arcgis.com).<sup>5</sup> Volunteer Scotland has prepared a summary table of the main funding sources available to third sector organisations: see Appendix 1. This provides links to the full details of the funds and any completed or in progress evaluations. Some of the funds provide breakdowns of the organisations in receipt of funding, by size (using income as a proxy) and geographical coverage.

Not only did this funding help to sustain and support service delivery of third sector organisations, but it also helped to support the key role of volunteers. As evidenced in [sections 6.3-6.6](#), funding is a major issue for both infrastructure organisations and VIOs.

This short sub-section addresses the attributes of the Scottish Government's funding and also identified areas for possible improvement. It draws upon interviews with the Scottish Government and SCVO. The latter organisation has had a key role in supporting the Scottish Government's funding programme, has maintained a comprehensive library of emergency funding resources and has helped to administer some funds.

### **5.6.1 Attributes of funding support**

**Effective collaboration with funding partners** – the Scottish Government acknowledged the importance of working with funding partners with the expertise and resource to support the development and operation of the funds. The 'architecture' of the Scottish Government, TSIs and national funders working together was seen as pivotal. This facilitated the prompt and effective distribution of funds from national partners responsible for fund administration to meet the needs of local organisations (small as well as medium/ large) and communities. However, a lot of coordination and management and administrative support is required to achieve this.

**Early provision of funding** – the Scottish Government stated that the speed of fund development and the issue of funds was a key strength at the height of the crisis. The funds were also easily accessible to help organisations keep going and remain viable. This view was supported by SCVO:

“There was lots of money made available very early to support the voluntary sector and volunteering, which was great.” (SCVO)

**Importance of real-time learning** – the Scottish Government stressed the importance of learning as the pandemic unfolded. For example, as time went by the available funding from Scottish Government was significantly more constrained. For the 'Adapt and Thrive' fund in late 2020 /early 2021 there was a stronger evidence-based approach to assess who needs the support and the nature of support that was most appropriate, particularly for trading organisations.

**Flexibility and risk taking** – the need for funds to have sufficient flexibility and to accept a reasonable level of risk were important:

“But I think that it was good to be able to get the money out and doing things and it was flexible.... there was a good level of risk taking and the ability to use the existing infrastructure, trust, people. Open calls for funding.....” (SCVO)

**Centralised funding information** – SCVO set up a Funding Hub to coordinate the funding offer to the third sector:

“For us to get that emergency hub up and be constantly kind of interpreting the guidance or communicating the guidance and being the one place where you know information on the funds were all routed through. And, so, it was a bit more coordinated.” (SCVO)

**Positive impact of funding** – it was a major factor in helping organisations to survive and face the major financial challenges resulting from COVID-19.

### 5.6.2 Areas for possible improvement

**More time for planning** – while one of the strengths was the fast release of funds, allowing a bit more time to determine what needs each fund was meeting, their specific objectives, and to clearly separate out the funds would have been helpful. Both the Scottish Government and SCVO acknowledged this was an issue. However, given the pressures of a crisis of the scale, complexity and uncertainty of COVID-19 the lack of time for planning may be an unavoidable fact of life.

There is also a separate funding issue highlighted by infrastructure organisations in [Section 6.5](#) relating to the support of core and operational costs of the TSI Scotland Network. However, such funding requests lie outside the boundaries of the funds discussed in this section.

## References

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6. RadioV: Bringing Scotland's volunteers together: <https://www.volunteerscotland.net/radio-v/>