Section 7

Lessons learned and next steps

Contents

This final section focuses on key lessons learned from Scotland's third sector and the volunteering response to COVID-19 as outlined in Sections 3 – 5. What's worked and can be capitalized upon and what areas could be improved?

It is structured into three sub-sections to answer specific questions:

- 7.1 How to strengthen Scotland's volunteering response for future crises?
- 7.2 How to build on the positive legacy from COVID-19?
- 7.3 How to turn 'evidence into action'?

The analysis in 7.1 and 7.2 is heavily reliant on evidence from the Scottish Government survey dated May 2021 and a word of caution is necessary.[1] Given that Section 7 was written in January 2022, some eight months after the Scottish Government survey, it is quite possible that some of the issues identified may now have been resolved and what are identified as key issues may no longer be priorities. Furthermore, the research methodology under-represented important stakeholder voices such as funders, umbrella organisations and national bodies with expertise relevant to key themes such as community engagement and inclusion.

Therefore, our objective, in partnership with the Scottish Government and the wider sector, is to invite further critical review of the research evidence presented in Section 7, the process for which is outlined in sub-section 7.3.

7.1 How to strengthen Scotland's volunteering response for future crises?

7.1.1 Learning from the resilience response of the voluntary sector

Good communication, coordination of partners, effective partnership working and shared learning were key to the effective resilience response in Scotland's local authority areas. The strong findings from the 'Road to Recovery' report are endorsed by the evidence in 'Shifting the Balance' which provides positive feedback on Scotland's response during the first lockdown:[2]

> "Though the depth of implementation and engagement with these frameworks certainly varies in different parts of Scotland, the areas where these structures have had significant focus appear to have found themselves well-positioned to confront a crisis on the scale of the pandemic – and originate new practices in response to it."

However, there are specific lessons to be learned in the following aspects of the resilience response:

- **Long-term resilience** – improving resilience to the longer-term societal challenges exacerbated by a crisis, versus meeting the short-term crisis response. This has implications for the Scottish Government, national and local stakeholders, and VIOs focused on addressing these long-term challenges through formal volunteering.

- **Resilience planning** – the key positives were the policy, strategic and operational commitment from Scottish Government – specifically the preparatory resilience work of the Resilience Division and partners, the suite of guidance documents and the Ready Scotland website. The geographical resilience planning structure was also a strength. Priorities for action are focused on building on the positive trends during COVID-19:

    o Continuing the integration of the voluntary and community sector alongside Category 1 and 2 responders
    o Embedding the voluntary and community sector more effectively in Local Resilience Partnerships (LRPs) and Groups – particularly the TSIs.
    o Supporting those local authority areas where resilience planning needs to be strengthened (there was evidence of variation in engagement in resilience planning across the 32 local authority areas)
    o Promoting the sharing of learning between Local Resilience Partnerships and Groups, including innovative ideas and ways of working.

- **Recognition and support for mutual aid groups** – ensuring that the newfound recognition of mutual aid groups' role in a crisis is retained and that appropriate support is provided:

    o Long-term sustainability – supporting those mutual aid groups that wish to continue their services beyond COVID-19, enabling them to develop creative ways to be sustainable.
    o Risk management – identifying and managing risks such as safeguarding for Protected and Vulnerable Groups; and confidentiality issues relating to GDPR
    o Volunteer safety – ensuring a safe working environment for volunteers.

- **Recognition and support for informal volunteering** – ensuring that the newfound recognition of informal volunteering in a crisis is retained and that appropriate information and guidance is provided to help volunteers remain safe. This includes guidance to support volunteers in helping their neighbours, friends and colleagues – especially local community support focused on crisis needs, and mitigation of social isolation and loneliness.

- **Collaboration and connection** – the more connected communities are in 'steady state' the more resilient they are likely to be when a crisis hits. Partnerships and strong relationships locally are therefore crucial.

"We are pleased with the response to the pandemic, but recognise it was built on partnership with our communities. We need to strengthen this relationship to make us and our communities more resilient to similar situations in the future." (VIO)[1]

7.1.2 Learning from the response of Scottish Government and national level bodies

Scottish Government's policies and partnership working pre-COVID-19 facilitated the third sector's response to the pandemic. These strengths included:

- The significant policy and operational focus to build Scotland's resilience within the third sector;
- The policy direction relating to volunteering which stems from the 'Volunteering for All: Our National Framework;[3] and
- The effectiveness of partnership working, and the relationships established between the Scottish Government, the public and third sectors before March 2020.

Furthermore, Scottish Government continued to evolve and enhance its resilience infrastructure and operational support to the third sector during COVID-19. The report 'Shifting the Balance' highlighted this contribution:[2]

"Scotland's government has been working to develop a comprehensive framework to empower communities and civil society organisations to address local issues. The resulting systems have had a significant impact on the way that Scottish localities have been responding to the pandemic." (Report: 'Shifting the Balance')

VIOs were generally very positive regarding the COVID-19 response by Scottish Government and national bodies such as SCVO and Volunteer Scotland.[1] They recognised that these really were 'unprecedented times' and that the provision of cross-sector support was complex and that mistakes were made:

"It was unprecedented and while we have all had a moan or two, I don't think it's fair to criticise those tasked with making almost impossible decisions." (Infrastructure organisation)

However, this research has identified important lessons which can be drawn upon in helping Scotland to prepare for future crises, including:

- **National volunteering campaigns** – there are lessons learned from Scotland Cares which can help to inform future initiatives of this nature. There would be merit in Scottish Government and key partners coming together to review the following factors:

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- o **Consultation pre-launch** – could communication with, and inputs from, the key volunteering organisations in Scotland be improved? This includes Volunteer Scotland, the TSI Scotland Network and other key partners such as SCVO.
- o **Appraisal process** – to review how the campaign was appraised by Scottish Government and what changes, if any, could be effected.
- o **Getting the timing right** – balancing the need to act quickly and decisively versus giving sufficient time for planning the details of such a campaign, giving advance notice to the TSIs, etc.
- o **Collaboration post-launch** – the way Scottish Government and third sector partners came together to help develop and deliver the Scotland Cares campaign was seen as a real strength. There may be lessons that could be capitalised on for future campaigns, events, and relationships more generally.
- o **Managing volunteers' expectations**: how best to manage volunteers' expectations when there are significant variables in a campaign of this nature.
- o **Don't forget your existing volunteers** – alongside the management and onboarding of new volunteers from Scotland Cares it was very important to acknowledge the contribution of the ongoing volunteering effort across Scotland.

- **National leadership** – a key finding from COVID-19 was the positive way in which the Scottish Government and national bodies with responsibility for leadership of volunteering came together to address the challenges of COVID-19. There was a high level of collaboration and at pace, and there is the opportunity to embed this as a lasting legacy, not just for handling future crises, but also building on these strengthened relationships in 'steady state'. However, one aspect that should be reviewed is the structure and modus operandi of a national leadership team for volunteering during a crisis. This includes the organisations to be represented, chairing responsibility and the consensual decision-making model.

- **Local leadership and coordination** – TSIs' leadership role for volunteering is now much more widely recognised at the local authority level and this needs to be embedded across all areas. Suggestions to further enhance local leadership includes:

  - o Developing Scottish Government and national partners' understanding of the services, skills and expertise of TSIs and partners locally – what they can do, how they can help in a crisis and how they can work together more effectively and optimise their contribution in 'steady state'.
  - o Scottish Government and national partners' role in facilitating greater autonomy and flexibility at a local level – devolving decision-making and support to TSIs and partners to utilise their local knowledge to best effect. A good example of this was Scottish Government's decision to engage the TSI Scotland Network in partnership with local integrated Health Authorities in the administration and distribution of the £15 million funding from the Communities and Mental Health Wellbeing Fund.[9]

- o Local authorities, TSIs and partners facilitating community planning and action at the sub-local authority level, giving a more localised approach.

- **Clarity in leadership and support roles:**

  - o Clarity in responsibilities between national, local and community organisations – especially leadership roles versus support roles

  - o Enhanced cascade of responsibilities from national, to local, to community. Focus on understanding needs and priorities for action locally, and the support required by local/community groups and local partners to help deliver this.

- **Funding** – lessons learned in the provision of funding support during a crisis include:

  - o Recognition of the vital role played by infrastructure organisations during the pandemic and their ongoing funding needs to enable them to support VIOs and volunteers in the recovery and the future (specifically TSIs and national umbrella bodies)
  - o More long-term funding and sustained support to enable organisations to plan and develop their work to better support their users and clients. This builds upon Scottish Government's commitment to multi-year funding.[11]
  - o Speed of the funding response during a crisis is important – but a balance has to be struck in taking sufficient time 'to get it right'
  - o Flexibility, innovation and creativity in funding for the sector, including provision of unrestricted funding – see findings on 'Good Grant Making' from wider UK research.[5] (Note: Scottish Government has provided a proportion of unrestricted funding during COVID-19, and it is important to maintain a balance between restricted and unrestricted funding.)
  - o Funding targeted at supporting volunteer management and coordination by VIOs, which was identified as a top priority during COVID-19.

- **Information and guidance** – dissemination of clear and concise information, advice and guidance by Scottish Government and/or national partners to facilitate the mobilisation of volunteers by VIOs and mutual aid groups, and those volunteering informally. The priority in a crisis is to understand the impacts on the community and service users and how VIOs, staff and volunteers need to respond:

  > "The voluntary sector has been essential during the pandemic and if it were to happen again good, clear guidance for the sector on what can and can't be done is a priority."

- **Partnership approach to plan for future crises** – to complement national and local resilience planning:
  - o Continue to build on the integration of the voluntary sector and volunteering response to future crises into national and local resilience planning –

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encompassing the contribution from formal volunteering, mutual aid and informal volunteering.

- o Identify and engage key partners now and build on existing collaborations. Bring partners together to help plan the response for future crises.
- o Being clear that partners' involvement in crisis planning brings with it an obligation to help lead and coordinate the voluntary sector's response for future crises.
- o Learn from the work of the Social Renewal Advisory Board's Communities and Volunteering Circle recommendations.[4]

7.1.3 Learning from the response of infrastructure organisations (within local authority areas)

Infrastructure organisations came together in the face of the crisis in a way that had not happened in 'steady state'. This local collaboration was characterised by partners tackling a shared challenge with effective team working at the centre. A key aspect of this collaboration was the recognition by local partners of TSIs' leadership and expertise in volunteering. However, this response was not uniform across the 32 local authority areas and there are important lessons which can be built upon:

- **Local authority and TSI engagement** – in seven local authority areas there was evidence of a lack of inclusion of TSIs in local structures and systems. Infrastructure organisations pointed to a lack of partnership philosophy and the need for more collaboration and shared ownership.

- **Local partnership working and communication** – 40% of VIOs rated the wider coordination of the volunteering response between different organisations in the areas or sectors in which their organisation worked to be 'limited' or 'none'. Lessons learned included:

  - o The need for better communication and collaboration between the Council, TSIs and the local resilience groups in some areas
  - o More formal links with community councils and volunteering organisations as 'signed-up members' of the local partnership
  - o Recognition and support for local mutual aid groups as an integral part of local collaboration.

- **The role of the TSI Scotland Network** – the evidence highlights the importance of the TSI Scotland Network and its contribution during the pandemic – it was now 'working as a Network' and this needs to be retained and built upon to support the third sector and volunteering in the future:

"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." (TSI perspective)

- **Community leadership** – TSIs and local partners should recognise the importance of community-led action – with TSIs facilitating rather than leading at the community level:
  - More community and local level communication and engagement
  - Communities are best placed to support themselves – they know where the needs are and where the gaps in provision exist (reference to the role of mutual aid groups and community groups).
  - Additional support for smaller, local and community groups and for these groups to be included in local area decision making.
  - Ensuring that policies and campaigns are adapted to the needs of local areas.

- **Contingency planning to be in place** - infrastructure organisations (26%) recognised the need to have contingency plans, protocols and infrastructure in place that could be initiated in the event of a major incident, such as the COVID-19 pandemic:

  - "We would like to plan and connect with other organisations rather than just reacting to an emergency…."
  - "We want to put things in place now, resilience planning, registrations and training in communities that will ensure that we are better able to support the identification of individuals, organisations and opportunities to maximise investment if necessary in the future. We are a more active part of the resilience planning process now and that will make a big difference."

7.1.4 Learning from the response of Volunteer Involving Organisations

VIOs identified key areas of learning to take forward in the recovery and in their response to future crises:

- **Contingency planning** – this was on two levels:

  - Planning by infrastructure organisations to support VIOs in their preparedness for future crises – including funding models.
  - Planning by VIOs themselves in terms of potential impacts from future crises – such as maintaining service delivery, premises provision (or alternatives for virtual delivery), the role of digital technology, etc.

- **Recognition and celebration** – increased recognition and celebration of volunteers and volunteering by VIOs (but this applies to other stakeholders as well – see discussion in 7.2.4).

- **Health and wellbeing** of staff and volunteers – this is a key issue for any major future long-term crisis such as COVID-19. Importantly, this includes the health and wellbeing of trustees, which is often neglected.

- **Supporting volunteers** – the importance of supporting volunteers during a crisis. COVID-19 has shown the major challenges volunteers have faced both from the virus itself, the compliance with restrictions and in the execution of their volunteering roles. This necessitates comprehensive support as illustrated by this VIO:

> "Offering support, ensuring the wellbeing of volunteers, and keeping volunteers engaged, informed and their motivation to remain was challenging." [1] (VIO)

7.2 How to build upon COVID-19's volunteering legacy?

This sub-section examines the potential to embed a longer-term legacy from COVID-19. This includes not just the opportunities that could be capitalised upon, but also the challenges which need to be addressed. These opportunities and challenges are relevant to a post-recovery period of 'steady state' conditions, compared to the actions required for facing future crises (the focus of sub-section 7.1). Unsurprisingly, a few of the actions recommended in 7.2 are similar to those listed in 7.1

7.2.1 Engaging new volunteers and returners

COVID-19 highlighted a big change in volunteering engagement in Scotland. Particularly during the first lockdown there was a major upsurge in interest in volunteering and the total adult volunteering participation rate increased from 45% pre-COVID to 74% for the period April - June 2020 (Ipsos MORI survey).[6] The Scottish Household Survey 2020 confirmed this sea-change in volunteering participation with the total adult volunteering participation increasing from 48% in 2018 to 64% in 2020.[10]

However, all of the increase in the SHS participation rate was accounted for by informal volunteering up to 56%, with the formal volunteering participation rate remaining static at 26%. Furthermore, this latter figure is likely to have been 'inflated' by those volunteering through mutual aid groups. Therefore, for formal volunteering COVID-19 has presented major challenges in volunteer engagement.

Volunteer recruitment – the Scottish Government survey in May 2021 highlighted how important volunteer recruitment is for both VIOs and infrastructure organisations as we go down the road to recovery.[1] An increased supply of formal volunteers will be a key facilitator in the growth and sustainability of the third sector. The opportunity is not just to engage former volunteers, but to capitalize on the interest of those new to volunteering, such as the increased engagement by younger people.

Inclusive volunteering – encouraging and supporting inclusive volunteering, including trying to tackle barriers to access that may have been exacerbated by COVID-19, was identified as a priority for the recovery of the third sector by infrastructure organisations.[1] However, VIOs have been seriously challenged by the pandemic and inclusive volunteering was not seen as a priority for the majority during the height of the pandemic.

However, a clear priority for the longer term is a more inclusive volunteering environment in Scotland, which supports the attainment of the Volunteering for All Outcome: "There are diverse, quality and inclusive opportunities for everyone to get involved and stay involved".[3]

7.2.2 Addressing key societal challenges

COVID-19 has highlighted the importance of the third sector and volunteering in combatting long-term societal challenges. In particular:
- Mental and physical ill-health
- Social isolation and loneliness
- Poverty and homelessness
- Those suffering abuse, addiction
- Etc., etc.

The third sector's response has also highlighted how important this contribution is in helping to alleviate these societal challenges. This contribution needs to be recognised and supported by Government Departments, agencies and funders in 'steady state' – not just in response to the pandemic.

Support for volunteering is essential across the spectrum of volunteering engagement:

- Formal volunteering – the bedrock of support for the more complex needs:
  - 50% of the VIOs surveyed had undertaken befriending or had kept in touch with people who were at risk of being lonely during the first lockdown. This only decreased to 48% during the second lockdown.
  - 42% of VIOs had helped to support people's physical or mental health during both the first and second lockdowns.[1]
- Mutual aid volunteering – for services linked to ongoing crisis support needs such as food banks/distribution
- Informal volunteering – in supporting those who are isolated and lonely. The 'keeping in touch' with friends and neighbours – to support more connected communities.

Funding and national level support - the pandemic has highlighted how Scottish Government and key partners can mobilise funding quickly in the face of a national crisis to support the vital role of the voluntary sector and volunteering during a crisis.

However, there is a need to embed this enhanced appreciation of what the voluntary sector can contribute, and the fact that national level support is critical to this – both financial and non-financial (information, guidance, toolkits, collaboration, etc.). This is all the more important given that these societal challenges are long-term and won't 'go away' once COVID-19 is under control.

- VIOs also highlighted their concerns over the funding environment, the pressures this exerted on their organisations and the need for improvements in the funding model: The majority noted that "funding is a constant source of uncertainty".[1]

- "…a simpler and easier method of securing longer term funding". "There is also an issue of funding streams being heavily restricted and only in place for a short period of time, making it difficult to develop plans beyond 2-3 years."

Influencing funders - there would be merit in bringing together a representative group of funders to discuss how to improve the awareness and understanding of volunteering by funders, and the resources required to support volunteers and volunteering. The way in which funding is allocated and distributed also needs to be reviewed. Specific issues for consideration include:

- Security in funding with longer-term, multi-year commitments
- Simplifying application and grant-making processes with reduced bureaucracy
- Speed of funding distribution - COVID-19 has demonstrated what can be achieved during a crisis period versus 'steady state'.
- Flexibility, innovation and creativity in funding for the sector.

Consideration also needs to be given to the funding needs not just of VIOs, but also of infrastructure organisations. There has been an increased recognition of the vital role played by infrastructure organisations during the pandemic, and it is appropriate to review their ongoing funding needs to enable them to support VIOs and volunteers; not just for the recovery but also over the long term. (See also discussion of funding in 7.1.2)

7.2.3 Uptake of digital technology

COVID-19 has required very significant adaptation of service delivery models by VIOs to try and maintain business continuity and, in many cases, the very survival of their organisation. Top of these adaptations has been the use of phone/digital platforms, with 56% of VIOs surveyed moving some or all of their activities online in Scotland.[1]

The priority is to capitalize on the digital benefits for volunteer coordination and service delivery going forward. The benefits include:

- Improved reach with volunteers and service users:
    - Additional beneficiaries being reached – especially in remote locations
    - Attracting a wider geographical pool of volunteers
- Improved communication and team working with volunteers and staff (especially when working over a large geography)
- The delivery of benefits for both rural and urban areas
- The ability of digital technology to support new and enhanced services
- The cost savings and reduced carbon footprint from digital technology.

However, there is also a need to recognise the limitations of digital technology. The switch to digital was no universal panacea and there were significant challenges for many VIOs:

- Volunteers' lack of digital skills
- The exclusion of beneficiary groups such as older adults, disabled people and those excluded due to the cost/lack of equipment

- The basic fact that many services are not suited to online delivery. Face-to-face engagement remains critical for so many services.

7.2.4 Recognition and celebration of volunteering

VIO support – COVID-19 has had a significant impact on VIOs' appreciation and recognition of the contribution of their own volunteers.[1] The pandemic reaffirmed the vital importance that volunteers have within VIOs, within the communities they serve and within Scotland's response to COVID-19. It is therefore important for all VIOs to fully recognize the contribution of their volunteers and to demonstrate this internally (to volunteers, staff and trustees) and externally to their stakeholders – not just during a crisis but on an ongoing basis.

Government and national level support – in the Scottish Government survey VIOs identified the need for increased recognition of volunteering and the value of volunteers, not just by VIOs themselves, but also by the Scottish Government, its agencies, local government and businesses.[1]

Support from Government & infrastructure organisations
"Greater recognition of [the] value of volunteering to [the] community by Government agencies." (VIO)
"We need local and national government to build confidence and encourage people/organisations to restart volunteering projects again across Scotland". (VIO)
"The Scottish Government should also consider a campaign to incentivise private and public sector companies to formally recognise volunteering and support employees to undertake voluntary work." (VIO)

Linkage to inclusive volunteering – VIOs also highlighted the disproportionately important role which recognition has in supporting a more inclusive volunteering outcome:[1]

"Many of our volunteers have been out of or have never been part of the job market and find accessing employment very difficult and volunteering experience is not fully recognised by employers. There needs to be a national recognition scheme for volunteers particularly those who have lived experience of poverty, addiction, exclusion who are helping through their experience to help others and using their voices to design and deliver services to receive greater recognition."

Infrastructure organisations' support – a number of infrastructure organisations highlighted their commitment to "…continue to recognise the great efforts of volunteering…' and "….to 'work with organisations and communities to better show appreciation and support for volunteers".[1] For infrastructure organisation's this recognition and celebration role is usually seen as a shared responsibility with partners, even if they are the leaders in this area.

7.2.5 Collaboration of national and local infrastructure organisations

Infrastructure organisations noted the importance of both continuing and strengthening the partnership working that had taken place during COVID-19 (see further discussion in 7.1.3):[1]

- TSI Scotland Network – building upon the gains made in the effective operationalization of the Network during COVID-19
- TSI and local authority engagement – building upon the improved collaboration and joint working in relation to volunteering – in structures such as Community Planning Partnerships and Local Resilience Partnerships
- Scottish Government and national bodies – to improve the communication channels with the TSIs and local partners – specifically giving a clearer voice to the TSI Scotland Network in national planning matters relating to the third sector and volunteering.
- Strengthening specific local authority areas where progress during COVID-19 has been weaker.

VIOs also identified the importance of sharing data, expertise and resources between partners more effectively – both locally and nationally.[1]

7.2.6 Community engagement

Stronger and more resilient communities – one of the remarkable features of the pandemic has been people's willingness to contribute through mutual aid and informal volunteering. The positive community impacts include bringing people together, developing new connections and better relationships, supporting one another and just kindness. What was also interesting was how much this contribution was recognised and valued by the infrastructure organisations in Scotland whose focus pre-pandemic was largely formal volunteering. However, the challenge going forward is how best to foster and support this new spirit of community engagement.

The infrastructure organisations put forward specific suggestions to build stronger and more resilient communities through volunteering, including:[1]

- Working with communities to continue to see volunteering as an important aspect of community life.
- The provision of community hubs and support staff to ensure that those people who need the assistance get it.
- Continue to build the 'Volunteer Brand' in local communities which provides a volunteer focused/community-based platform for local people to engage with.
- Infrastructure organisations to undertake needs-based assessment of their local communities to determine how best to support groups/ volunteers and develop more resilient communities.
- Provision of additional funding to support community groups in their recovery.

Infrastructure organisations also acknowledged the opportunity to make Scotland's communities more inclusive, and to capitalise on the contributions from informal volunteering and mutual aid. Specific programmes of support are planned or underway by the TSIs and partners and the learning from these interventions should be shared locally, regionally and nationally as appropriate.[1]

Youth volunteering – a number of infrastructure organisations were "*particularly concerned about young people*" and how the pandemic had impacted upon their opportunities to volunteer.[1] Rejuvenating youth volunteering was identified as a priority area for some of the infrastructure organisations in the aftermath of the pandemic:

- Working with statutory partners and VIOs to support young people into volunteering and beyond.
- Reconnecting with local schools to encourage uptake of the Saltire Awards
- Encouraging schools to recognise the digital volunteering that was done by young people over the course of the pandemic.
- Engaging young people, for example through the Youth Guarantee Scheme, and a youth employability proposal.

7.3 How to turn evidence into action?

Scotland benefits from having the Third Sector Unit in Scottish Government, which has a specific responsibility for volunteering. It was this Unit which led the development of the 'Volunteering for All: Our National Framework' published in April 2019. It provides a broad strategic framework which is currently being developed into a Volunteering Action Plan for Scotland. Therefore, the timing of the MVA study is fortuitous as its findings will help inform the development of the new 10-year Volunteering Action Plan (VAP).

To help this process of 'evidence into action', the Road to Recovery report concludes with suggested guidance in four areas:

    (i)   Critical assessment and stress-testing of priorities for action

The lessons learned and priorities for action outlined in Section 7 need to be reviewed, stress-tested and, where appropriate, developed further. In some areas the recommended course of action is straightforward and unequivocal; but in other areas the priorities over exactly what should be done is much less clear-cut. It must also be remembered that the evidence from the Scottish Government's survey, upon which a lot of the findings in Section 7 are based, is now eight months old. There is also a need to reflect on priorities for action from linked and complementary initiatives such as the valuable recommendations from the Social Renewal Advisory Board and the Communities and Volunteering Circle.[7]

(ii)   Knowledge exchange activities

In addition to Scottish Government and national bodies such as Volunteer Scotland and SCVO, it will be essential to engage key stakeholders in the review process. As a minimum this should include representatives of TSI Scotland Network, local authorities, national sectoral bodies, funders and VIOs. The focus should be on:

- Reviewing and developing the priorities for action
- Informing the process for the implementation of the actions.

The current VAP structure could play a vital role in this regard as its members include representation from all of the stakeholder groups listed above. To assist the five VAP outcome-based Working Groups the Navigation Guide in Section 1 identifies the sections of the report most relevant to their specific outcomes:

- Lifelong engagement
- Policy
- Recognition and celebration
- Places and spaces
- Inclusive volunteering

The Governance Group could also play a key overarching role in the assessment of the evidence and the prioritisation of actions.

(iii)   Wider dissemination

It will also be important to share the 'Road to Recovery' findings more widely and Volunteer Scotland will work with the Scottish Government and key partners to support this dissemination process through social media, events and through the engagement of forums such as the Scottish Volunteering Forum and the Cross-Party Group for Volunteering.

(iv)   New evidence – an ongoing process

Finally, there must be an ongoing review of evidence on volunteering participation and community engagement to inform our understanding and learning about the long-term impact of COVID-19 on Scotland's third sector. The Scottish Third Sector Tracker will play an important role in monitoring the longer term impacts of COVID-19 on the third sector in Scotland.[8] The Tracker is run by an independent research company called DJS Research on behalf of SCVO, the Scottish Government, the William Grant Foundation and the National Lottery Community Fund. The Tracker collects quarterly panel data from Scottish third sector organisations to give current insights into the state of the sector, key trends, and developments. The first wave of the Tracker was completed by 585 third sector organisations based or operating in Scotland. A further five waves of the survey are planned, up to November 2022.

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