

Health Policy Officers Network – Key Note Briefing 29 April 2020

Background to the network

The HPON is a peer group of health policy officers which is jointly administered by Voluntary Health Scotland (VHS) and RNIB Scotland. The network is attended by a range of small to medium sized third sector organisations who meet to discuss a range of policy issues, current consultations and share intelligence. The group does not offer a policy influencing function. However, in previous years smaller groups have come together to deliver specific pieces of work under the banner of the network.

The normal format of the meetings includes a speaker and question and answer session followed by a general discussion and opportunity to share intelligence and raise future topics. In previous meetings we have invited speakers to speak about a range of topics including the Lobbying Register, Tony Rednall from the Scottish Government spoke about Diet and Obesity, Robert Skey discussed the progress of Public Health Reform and before that Phil Raines the lead on the Health and Social Care Delivery Plan spoke about the plan's implications for the third sector and Mark Simpson to discussed the digital strategy.

The first meeting of 2020 was held via zoom on 29 April and offered an opportunity for members to discuss issues around COVID-19, conduct some policy horizon scanning and suggest some topics for future meetings.

Attendees:

Anna Gryka-MacPhail – Obesity Action Scotland
Christina Sabbagh – Obesity Action Scotland
Claire Flemming -Diabetes Scotland
Deirdre Henderson – Inclusion Scotland
Frank Toner – British Lung Foundation/Asthma UK
Jennifer Fingland – Cycling Scotland
Jonathan Sher – Queens Nursing Institute
Kirsty Lynn Smith – Macmillan Cancer Support
Lilah Davidson – British Red Cross
Linda Alexander – Children's Health Scotland
Mairi Gordon – Samaritans Scotland
Tom Scott – See Me
Kiren Zubairi – VHS – HPON Convener
Laura Jones – RNIB Scotland – HPON Convener

Meeting notes

VHS has gathered intelligence from 143 organisations via a survey early on in the lockdown period detailing the impact of COVID-19 on people and on the voluntary health sector. Kiren Zubairi, VHS Policy Engagement Officer, gave a short presentation to highlight key findings published in a [Research Briefing](#).

Discussion

- **Asthma UK** – an emerging issue in certain local areas around access to inhalers and there not being enough available. The annual review of COPD has been cancelled. Diagnosis of lung conditions has ceased and will have long term consequences. – already seeing a rise in people being admitted to hospital with COPD. Certain face-to-face COPD support has had to be stopped or moved online which has barriers to access.
- **MacMillan** – experiencing a fall in referrals from GPs. Concerns around a rise in cancer diagnosis later in the year and the impact this will have on cancer support services, the NHS and people's cancer journey – especially with late diagnosis. Screening has ceased however, even if this was restarted there is concerns around whether people would be willing to go to an NHS venue for fear of catching COVID-19.
- **Inclusion Scotland** - survey and MSP briefings - includes the feedback "had to move in with my mum but the house isn't accessible so stuck in bed", and "what if you're coeliac and require a GF diet and receive a generic food parcel, you can't eat it". In addition, there were concerns raised about post-COVID - will services and support be taken away if stopped now - we need things to resume if possible. Regarding services going online – looking at reviewing different online tools for their accessibility, ease of use and security for use by those with disabilities.
- **RNIB Scotland** - concerns around people with sight loss missing urgent appointments as they do not want to visit their GP or hospital presently due to the coronavirus.
- **Samaritans** - carrying out mental health research over the next six months - what their seeing already are concerns relating to job security, pressure of looking after children, suicidal risks etc - at present, the focus is on the immediate crisis. Need to look to the long-term impact that COVID-19 will have on inequalities.
- **See Me** - people with mental health are refraining from accessing help due to the coronavirus pandemic. They are continuing to work on the Mental Health Review.
- **QNIS** – the QNIS webpage hosts official guidance on a range of issues this is accessible to all organisations and individuals. Offered to host other organisations guidance and information.

- **Cycling Scotland** - have a variety of information on our website about what are doing in response to the pandemic, including advice on cycling and information on how key workers can access bikes to enable them to travel to work safely and effectively - <https://www.cycling.scot/covid19-information>

Future focus

- Brexit in Health, climate emergency (not to lose traction from the positive impact the lockdown has had on the climate) and manifestos (the need for guidance about whether to proceed with manifestos or not - SCVO has already launched their [manifesto](#), looking ahead to 2030).
- Social impact on inequalities - before and after COVID – VHS conducting a scoping exercise.

AOB

- Writing a letter to the FM about thanking the voluntary sector about the work they are doing to support individuals during the coronavirus pandemic.

Date of the next meeting is Wednesday 24th June.

If you need any further information please do not hesitate to contact:

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