

Establishing a Voluntary Community Sector Leadership Forum - The Marmot Community Leadership Forum

It is likely that the year 2020 will go down in history as the one of the most challenging times facing the world in modern human endurance. It will be remembered for the devastating impact of the Covid-19 Coronavirus pandemic.

Records will show the many challenges faced by the scientists, governments, health and social care services and for communities across the world. It will highlight the hundreds of thousands of deaths and cases of Coronavirus and how its impact widened even further global social and health inequalities.

Many stories will be told about how organisations, people and volunteers came together to tackle the challenges faced by this unprecedented period and how the lessons learned, the strengths gained and the opportunities for change were harnessed for the greater good.

We are about to record one such story. A story about how a group of local community leaders decided to come together in a place and share their expertise, their resources and their drive and passion for a better world for the people they work with, for their own families and friends and for the communities they serve.

A place where, in a post-pandemic world, a collective focus is given to what makes us strong and what makes us thrive.

This is your invitation to be part of that story in the Colchester and surrounding areas by working closely together with other community leaders, to truly make a difference and build a better, more equal society.

Context and Background

Sir Michael Marmot, in the introduction of the recently published, 'Build Back Fairer: the Covid-19 Marmot Review' report, highlights our challenge:

Build Back Better has become the mantra. Important, but we need to Build Back Fairer. The levels of social, environmental and economic inequality in society are damaging health and well-being. As the UK emerges from the pandemic it would be a tragic mistake to attempt to re-establish the status quo that existed before the pandemic – a status quo marked in England, over the past decade, by stagnation of health improvement that was the second worst in Europe and widening health inequalities.

*(Build Back Fairer: the Covid-19 Marmot Review.
The Pandemic, Socioeconomic and Health Inequalities in England:
The Health Foundation; Institute of Health Equity: July 2021)*

The voluntary and community sector, including voluntary groups and parish councils, individuals and neighbours, were all well placed to respond to the changing needs of their communities during the pandemic and did so effectively using, in the main, a wartime-like critical response approach, providing rapid response and leadership where many other statutory organisations were unable to react in the same way. We could say that we have always been carrying out this function, but when others stood back we became far more visible.

At a local level, Community360 exists to assist members of the public, voluntary and community organisations by providing passionate, intelligent leadership in Colchester, Braintree, Essex and beyond.

Our vision is for a less unequal society. Our ambition is to use our efforts and influence to reduce inequalities and increase opportunities. The values by which we work are:

- Leadership: we seek to provide passionate, intelligent leadership for our communities
- Collaboration: we maximise our impact by building partnerships to work with communities
- Honesty: we maintain a reputation for integrity and trust
- Creativity: we are open-minded, we challenge how things are done and develop new approaches
- Inclusiveness: we seek to involve everyone, are friendly and caring
- Excellence: we value quality in everything we do

From people to processes, finance to fundraising, the pandemic has affected all areas within the non-state sector.

Community360 has worked closely in partnership in recent months with the North East Essex Health and Well-being Alliance, Colchester Borough Council, The One Colchester Partnership, Healthwatch and University of Essex to commission research and undertake several pieces of work. Together we sought to understand the continuing impact and how the sector is responding, and to capture our experiences and collective learning from the pandemic.

C360 commissioned the University of Essex to work with 22 leaders in our local place to share their stories. An Oral History Archive of the interviews has been captured sharing their experiences of tackling - head on - the exceptional challenges created by the crisis. The report includes:

- the organisational challenges faced by the sector
- the benefits and challenges of working remotely
- concerns and opportunities for the future

Reflection on the pandemic and pandemic response at organisational level can help shape strategic conversations about future service, resource and funding plans.

Our research suggests that the sector - alongside its funders, partners and stakeholders - has an opportunity to shape a changing landscape by integrating volunteers and volunteering into those strategic conversations about the future, building on and engaging with this new public awareness of and interest in voluntary and community action.

Dr Alix Green and Dr Rebecca Warren University of Essex:
Communities Responding to Crisis: Covid-19, Social Action and our local Neighbourhood

The full **North East Essex Communities Responding to Crisis** report can be accessed here:
<https://www.community360.org.uk/insight>

Community Asset Mapping

Research conducted by Community360 and Community Voluntary Services Tendring (CVST) beginning back in 2019 endeavoured to show how community assets are part and parcel of the communities that exist in Colchester and Tendring. They are the glue that holds us all together.

The first Community Assets Mapping reports, one for Colchester and one for Tendring, were published in January 2019. This most recent report was commissioned again to look at community activities, strengths, and challenges. It covers all North East Essex and draws upon local data from voluntary and community groups, case studies and consultation, to contextualise our place within the context of reports, including the Index of Multiple Deprivation update in 2019 and the Marmot Review 10 years on (which looked at progress made on prevention and tackling health inequalities). The report also explores the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on our communities, the way they work, their resilience and sustainability.

Extract from the Foreword: Mark Jarman-Howe Chair,
North East Essex Health & Wellbeing Alliance:
NEE Community Asset Mapping Refresh 2020

C360, CVST and Healthwatch Essex are committed to a three-year programme of research into community assets, their scale, structure, sustainability and accessibility. The first publication in a series of documents provided an overview of the sector. **Community Asset Mapping Refresh of North East Essex** can be accessed here: www.community360.org.uk/the-community-asset-mapping-refresh-north-east-essex-2020/

It will be followed with 'deep dive' research into themed areas, beginning with Children and Families services.

All of the research conducted by C360 is informing the development of a statement and vision for our future priorities and collaborative working aimed at building on the value the sector can providing in tackling systemic challenges. Due to be published in the Autumn, the document will trace how we have reached this point and include more community voices, local feelings and future aspirations. It will affirm our commitment that 'We Are Not Going Back' to the status quo.

It will consider the importance of six key areas:

- *Using local intelligence and insight*
- *Volunteering*
- *Funding relationships*
- *Partnership working*
- *Digital Accessibility*
- *Voluntary and Community Sector Sustainability and Accountability*

Rationale

One of the first ambitions emerging from our 'We Are Not Going Back' work is to establish a community voluntary sector leadership forum. There has never been a better time to form such an alliance of local leaders and community champions. With this in mind C360 would like to invite you to join us to:

- Strengthen our Leadership Culture
- Create a collaborative Call to Action
- Drive Clarity and Commitment from your local infrastructure agencies

The aim is to create a unified and consolidated voluntary and community sector leadership forum in Colchester to fight for a less unequal society and challenge the cultural norms. C360 can't do this alone or in isolation. It will be known as the Marmot Community Sector Leadership Forum.

Marmot Community Sector Leadership Forum Membership

We would like to bring together a number of anchor organisations that are playing a role in representing the sector at a place level, building on the success of One Colchester collaborative.

We want all groups to be visible, equal and contribute to quality of life in our *Borough through One Colchester*, and will be actively looking to recruit members to this newly formed leadership Forum.

One Colchester is the local multi-agency strategic partnership that exists to provide an opportunity to pool and deepen understanding of our Place, and to collaborate towards a shared plan to meet the strategic needs of the whole Borough.

The criteria being applied (including to those of us who will be working towards establishing this Forum) are that you should:

Organisation:

- be from an organisation that operates at a local, Borough level
- have charitable/non-profit making aims and objectives that are consistent with the Forum's aims and objectives (to be agreed by The Forum)

Organisation's Representative must:

- operate within a senior leadership role
- hold the authority to make strategic decisions on behalf of their organisation
- be committed to the objectives of the Forum, beyond their organisation's remit and can commit to adding value to the group through knowledge, experience and networks and commit to engagement in the Forum at some level over a year e.g. attending meetings, ad hoc workshops, responding to the agenda by email, buddying with another representative to pass through thoughts, knowledge and views.

Once we launch the Marmot Leadership Forum, we can start to formulate the following:

What does such a Forum want to achieve?

- What are the opportunities and appetite of VCSE system leaders to enact systemic changes?
- Consider Inequality and inequity - Vision/Goals/Ambitions

How the Marmot Community Sector Leadership Forum will link into existing Partnerships and Networks

- At local and county level
- Opportunities to build networks/partnerships

What Forum format options you want to consider

- How, as in what format, you would want this Forum to work?
- Online and in person?
- Chair/Vice-Chair and elected roles?
- Rolling Chair/Vice Chair roles?
- Democratic - no named leader/chairperson

Marketing and Promotion

- How/Where is this Forum best marketed?
- Methods?

Launch of the **Marmot Community Sector Leadership Forum** will take place on Monday 11th October 2-4.30 pm at our conference, officiated by Professor Sir Michael Marmot.

We will be clear about the next steps to turn vision into reality.

Phase 1: To bring leaders together to establish an appetite

Phase 2: To hold a conference in October with Professor Sir Michael Marmot – to launch our Marmot community leadership forum

Phase 3 – meet monthly

Phase 4 – all Marmot leaders feel confident to sit at strategic tables – not just C360

Tracy Rudling

C360 Chief Executive