

Issues affecting emergency financial support providers and service users during the Covid-19 pandemic, Evidence Note 1

Providers of emergency financial support and assistance are at the frontline of responding to Covid19. This briefing highlights some of the key challenges and issues that frontline organisations, such as councils, charities and other agencies are facing during this time.

The issues presented have been gathered from the responses to an online issue collection form for emergency financial support providers and reflect three key emerging themes. They relate to both the challenges faced by providers in delivering their services and the challenges facing service users.

This is the first briefing in a series that will be published regularly to highlight the changing issues as more data is gathered and the situation develops. The issues which are reported will be shared with central and local Government and other agencies to assist with the development of effective approaches to dealing with the challenges presented by Covid-19.

We will continue to collect and analyse responses through the Coronavirus pandemic. We encourage multiple responses as new and additional issues arise, so that we can capture as much evidence as possible as the situation changes. Please help us by [completing the evidence collection form and sharing across your networks.](#)

Theme 1 – Families and individuals with no internet access

This was reported as a common issue in relation to service users who do not have access to the internet because they do not own a computer or phone, or because they do not have WiFi or internet data on their devices. Support providers reported that this is causing a number of problems, including the ability to contact service users who they would usually support face-to-face.

“Participants, who pre-crisis would have come to see us if they have problems, do not have internet access and have no telephone credit, therefore cannot contact us”.

Respondents also reported difficulties that services are facing in providing necessary information to vulnerable groups who do not have internet access. One organisation that works with unpaid carers said that:

“Many carers we have contacted are not on the internet or email, so our main issue has been respond to those at this more vulnerable level, ensuring they have the most up to date information on where to seek help or support if/when required.”

Similarly, an organisation that supports vulnerable women reported that:

“helping women to engage online is time consuming and not all women have access- there is currently nothing to help us help them to obtain resources to get online”.

There were also concerns around how individuals without internet or telephone access have faced difficulties applying for Universal Credit:

“Clients who cannot access or negotiate the Internet are unable to get through to DWP on the phone, so they are unable to register an initial claim for UC.”

“[A] tenant I supported had no access to a computer and no internet so I had to set up for him as he couldn't get through [to DWP] on the phones.”

Similarly, there were issues reported about children who are required to undertake home learning, but do not have internet access:

“Many children do not have the necessary technology to engage in school programmes and will fall behind their peers.”

The lack of internet access is a real issue that seems to be affecting vulnerable service users in a range of ways. The Department for Education announcement to provide laptops and 4G routers to vulnerable groups of children and young people to help with education is welcome, but many of those who need support accessing the internet will not be reached by this scheme.

For some households facing significant barriers to online access, the short term priority needs to be access to offline support. One respondent shared an example of good practice in which a local authority had *“posted out information flyers to all residents, and is working closely with the voluntary sector to respond to need.”* We have heard from a number of Local Authorities which have taken this approach to ensure those without internet access are reached.

Theme 2 – Lack of coordination between services

Frontline support providers are playing an essential role in supporting their local communities during the crisis and some areas have seen new organisations set-up to help meet increased need. While it is positive that there has been an increased effort to support individuals and families affected by Covid-19, some issues were reported around the impacts of this on service coordination. In one local area, it was reported that several new foodbanks have been setup to meet increased need, but the foodbanks have not joined up with each other, or with the established foodbank in the area. There were concerns around the impacts of this:

“There is also significant risk of duplicating and therefore reduction of resources for all concerned, meaning some will get nothing while others get lots.”

A lack of coordination was also reported as an issue in another area:

“There is a lot of support taking place in many Boroughs but there seems to be a lack of willingness/understanding in the need for one co-ordinating lead. This has led to repeated requests for the same type of support from lots of small organisations (some only just set up to deal with the crisis).”

It appears the key issue here is that a lack of coordination will lead to duplication and gaps in support. At a time when emergency support providers are seeing their resources stretched to the limits, it is crucial that resources are used as efficiently as possible to make sure those who need support are able to receive it.

Survey respondents suggested that one organisation taking a leading role in coordinating a response in a local area would help with this. Respondents also highlighted the need for better communication between organisations working on different issues and the need to engage with small and newly established organisations in coordinating responses.

Theme 3 – Families and individuals who are at risk because they have No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)

Families with No Recourse to Public Funds are locked out from accessing essential support such as Universal Credit, Tax Credits and housing support, even if they cannot work because of Covid-19. This can cause extreme financial hardship if someone loses their job during the crisis. The NRPF condition was reported as a concern for service users who have lost their jobs and are not able to access support, leading to difficulties for families to meet basic needs and feed their children:

“People with NRPF are largely unaccounted for in this crisis. Romanian, Czech, Albanian families who are living in hard to reach communities and whose incomes have relied upon unconventional work patterns (car wash etc) have had their financial stream stopped and it is very difficult to support such families, often with a few children, some very young.”

Emerging issues

We have covered three key themes in this briefing, but many other concerns have been raised by respondents. We will share more information on these as we gather more insight. These include:

- Provision, availability and appropriateness of food
- Mental health of vulnerable clients
- Meeting the needs of those who would usually rely on face to face services
- Safeguarding clients and frontline workers