Scottish Community Safety Network

Community Safety Partnerships and Partner Organisations Questionnaire 2020

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Introduction

Over the last few months, SCSN have made contact again with a number of CSPs and community safety practitioners to find out how things have changed since we last made contact in April/May 2020. This time, we were particularly interested in finding out about **what has changed in this recovery phase[1], what has made a difference, new trends and relationships and learning for the 'renewal' phase**.

We have managed to make contact with **16 community safety leads (predominantly based in local authorities but working for the Community Safety Partnership) and 3 other partners**. Similarly, to our initial survey, we have been unable to obtain a response from a number of community safety leads/local authority areas, which we believe is around continuing IT issues, working from home and an upsurge in activity now lockdown is releasing.

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[1] This is regarding the first set of easing of restrictions in Scotland in June/July

We will continue to collect as much feedback as we can and feed this into some of the national processes via the Building Safer Communities group. We will continue to update community safety partners on this continually changing national picture. As always, we continue to offer Community Safety Partnerships support, assistance and help making connections at this time.

Survey Results

The majority of contacted CSPs said **the way in which their CSP functions has changed** since April 2020.

- Most CSPs had returned in some form. A few had only had one meeting since the beginning of lockdown. In discussions with CSPs since June/July we now know **most are meeting at a frequency close to normal** again.

- **IT issues and redeployment** to the frontline had an initial impact on functionality but most CSPs are now meeting virtually.

- Formal meetings continue to be less regular with **smaller, virtual operational meetings more common** which has allowed lines of communication with partners to remain open.
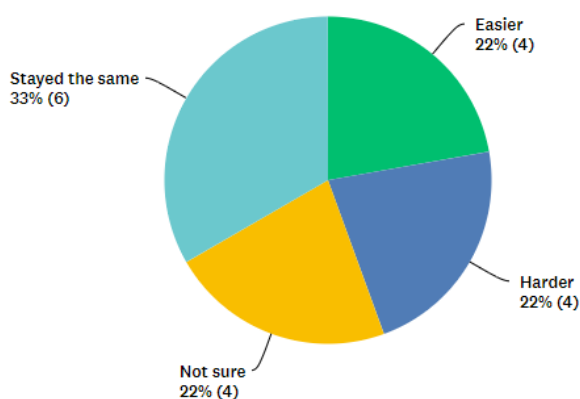

Participants responses were roughly split when asked whether they have found that **coping with the challenges of the COVID-19** crisis has become easier, harder, stayed the same or they were not sure.

- Of the 33% who stated things had stayed the same, it was noted that this was due to the **strong multi-agency partnerships that already existed.**

- Of the 22% who noted how things that have become easier, they stated that **adjustment to the 'new normal'** and **adapting to new methods** of working were working well.

- A few respondents cited **staff returning from redeployment** has also made things easier.

- Much detail was provided on the challenges CSPs continue to face. Many commented on the **challenge of continuing to try to deliver services under the current restrictions**, especially with staff working from home and/or limited staff availability. There have been problems closing cases and progressing actions. Many also noted that under these circumstances it is **difficult to manage public expectations with increasing enquiries/complaints** with lockdown releasing.

"Technology, creativity and innovative thinking has allowed us to meet many of the objectives"

- A few commented on the continued **difficulty in making the necessary arrangements to ensure partnership work continues**.

- One respondent noted that Court processes were moving forward while another complained of continued delays due to a backlog in criminal justice processes.

- These results show how **incredibly varied the experience of each local authority** area / Community Safety Partnership has been throughout recent times. This has **implications for how national organisations support local authority** areas / local CSPs..

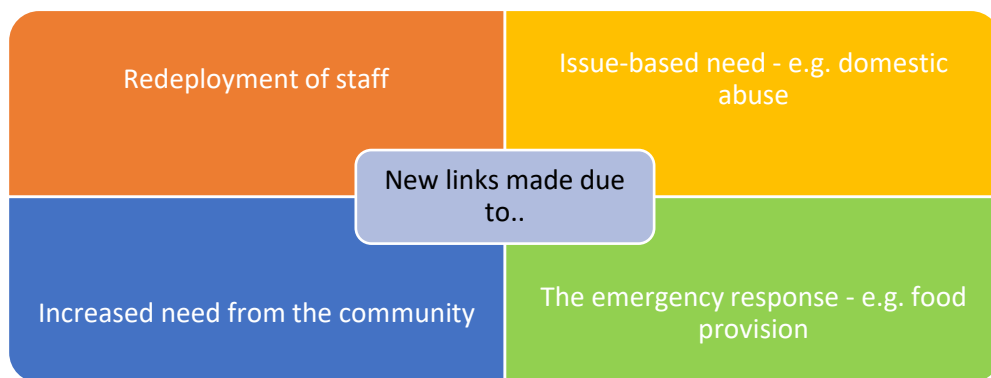Looking at what had helped or hindered CSPs during the last months:
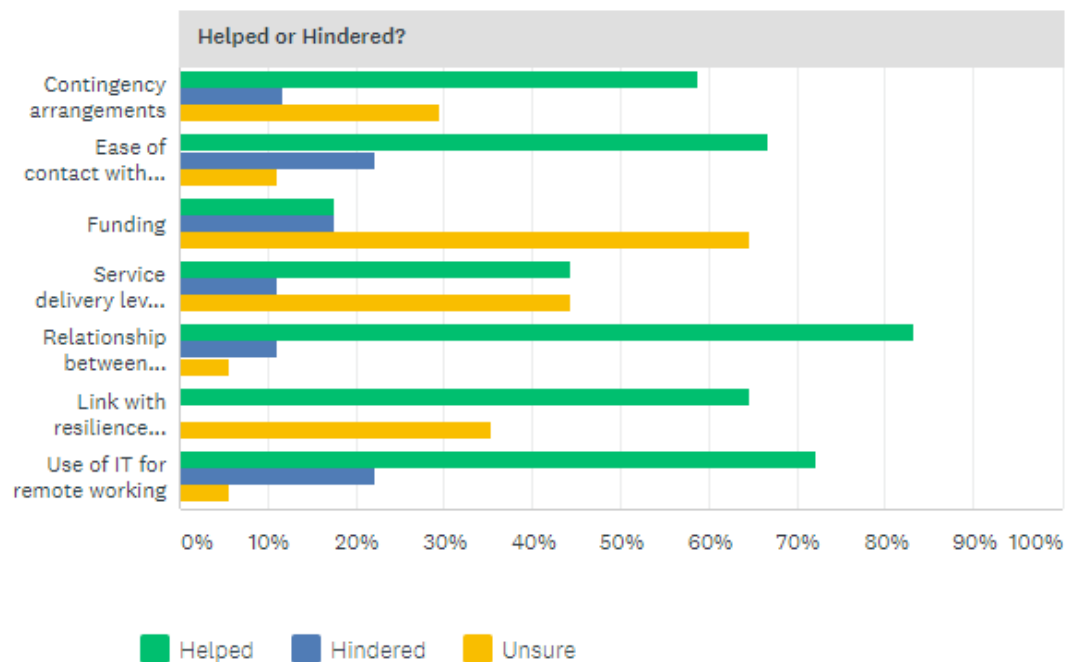
- The vast majority felt **contingency arrangements, ease of contact with community and partners, relationships between partners, links with resilience partnerships and use of IT and home working had helped**. There were a small number of CSPs who remained unsure these areas had helped or felt they were a hindrance.

- One respondent said use of IT for remote working was a hinderance in the beginning, which correlates with our earlier survey results.

- The majority felt **unsure around the issue of funding**.

- With community safety's non-statutory status, it is feared the sector may be **at risk of further cuts** once the financial impact of Covid-19 begins to show. From further discussions with CSP Leads however, it is clear that the **crisis has showcased the importance of community safety work** and the flexibility and breadth of skills within community

"Only time will tell the [financial] impact the pandemic has had on Local Authorities"

safety teams. With this new spotlight on the sector at a time when the impending economic recession will make community safety work ever more important, there is a **real opportunity to continue to make the case for community safety.**

New Relationships

- Only 42% respondents showed they had **increased or enhanced their links during the pandemic.** Half of these responses cited new links with local community organisations and the other half had made better links with other council departments such as housing and community learning and development.

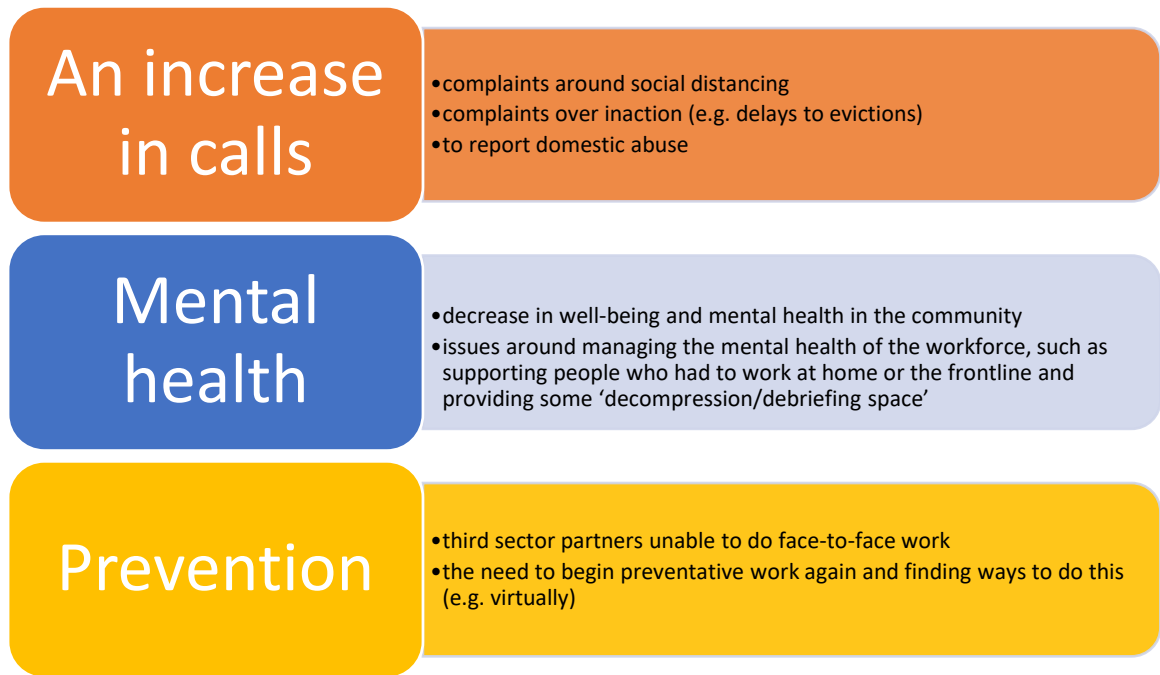- Reasons given for this increase were varied, see diagram below:

Redeployment of staff	Issue-based need - e.g. domestic abuse
New links made due to..	
Increased need from the community	The emergency response - e.g. food provision

- We have heard from discussions with CSP Leads that **working in locality hubs with community organisations helped form new links and projects**. Renfrewshire's 'Team Up to Clean Up' campaign was a particular example that has seen renewed vigour over the pandemic due to these new links. We have also heard about Inverclyde's closer working with children and young people's teams in the key worker hubs, Fife's new relationship with the community on fly-tipping and litter clear-ups and Perth and Kinross's fly-tipping fund.

- The response as to **how long these new relationships will continue for was varied** - some long term, some for the duration of the pandemic only, others still unclear.

- While these new links may not all need to continue, it is **well worth CSPs taking the time to reflect** on the benefits these links brought and how these might continue be built upon.
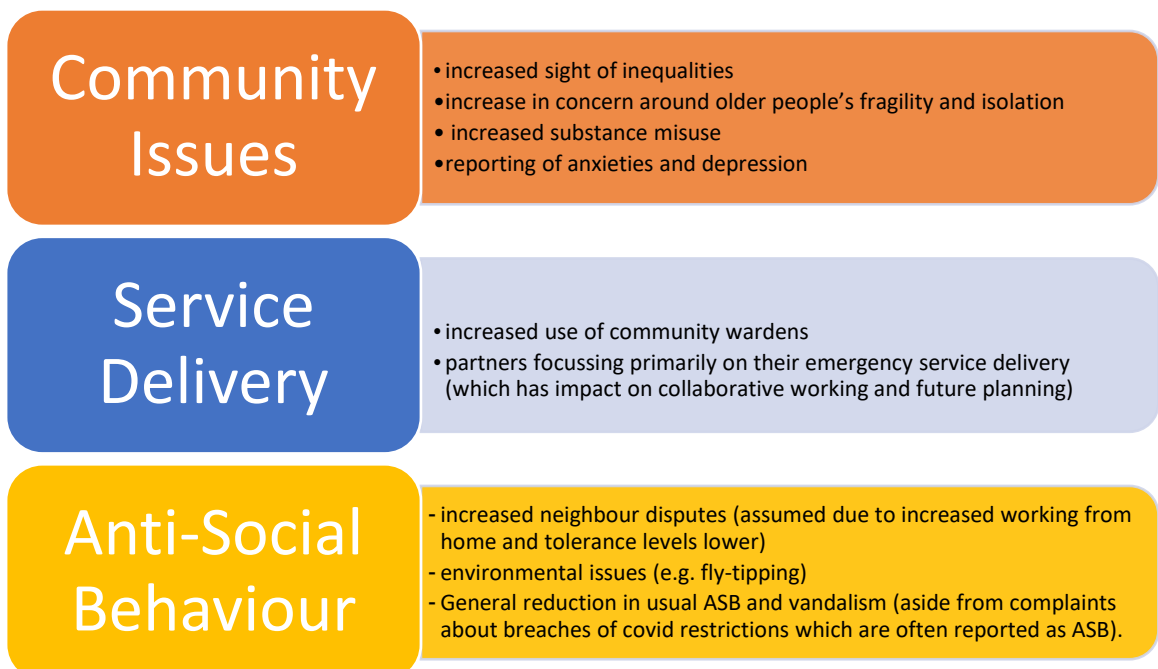
New and changing issues

We asked if there had been any **new trends emerging** since our last survey.

- Of those who responded to the question, around 50% said no or unsure.

- Some of the remaining responses noted:

An increase in calls	• complaints around social distancing • complaints over inaction (e.g. delays to evictions) • to report domestic abuse
Mental health	• decrease in well-being and mental health in the community • issues around managing the mental health of the workforce, such as supporting people who had to work at home or the frontline and providing some 'decompression/debriefing space'
Prevention	• third sector partners unable to do face-to-face work • the need to begin preventative work again and finding ways to do this (e.g. virtually)

We asked **what issues had changed** since the start of the pandemic?

- A third of the respondents to this question said none or unsure.

- Others mentioned:

Community Issues	• increased sight of inequalities • increase in concern around older people's fragility and isolation • increased substance misuse • reporting of anxieties and depression
Service Delivery	• increased use of community wardens • partners focussing primarily on their emergency service delivery (which has impact on collaborative working and future planning)
Anti-Social Behaviour	- increased neighbour disputes (assumed due to increased working from home and tolerance levels lower) - environmental issues (e.g. fly-tipping) - General reduction in usual ASB and vandalism (aside from complaints about breaches of covid restrictions which are often reported as ASB).

N.B. We know from discussions with partners that since June/July, in many cases, community safety issues/demand has returned to usual levels.

When asked about **measures that have helped cope with any challenges**:

- The majority of respondents to the question noted how **strong partnership work had helped during this time**. In particular, reviewing practice, sharing information, keeping in regular contact, flexibility and agility, a 'can-do' attitude and willingness to work together, formalised risk management structures and clear allocation of ownership.

- These efforts to improve partnership working at this time are very promising and **SCSN would encourage CSPs to look at what worked and why as it is important to take the opportunity to 'build back better'.**

- Other things that have helped are; links to the third sector, the lockdown restrictions, good communication with the community, technology and additional funding from the Scottish Government.

Recovery and Renewal

As the restrictions begin to ease, we asked CSPs:

What particular community safety issues are anticipated to emerge as a concern?	
Short term	**Long term**
- **Increase in anti-social behaviour**	- **The majority of respondents cited** <u>**mental health, domestic abuse**</u> **and** <u>**poverty and inequality**</u> **as the three main long-term issues of concern.**
- **Calls about youth disorder**	
- **Working with businesses to ensure they are adhering to government guidance**	- **Other long-term issues were:**
- **Inconsiderate camping (local authorities with rural areas/beauty spots only)**	- **Increased risk of falls and fractures among older people**
- **Crowds gathering**	- **The effect of under-reporting of issues**
- **Supporting staff who have been shielding to feel comfortable returning to the frontline**	- **Unemployment**
	- **The financial impact of Covid-19 on services**
- **Catching up with the lower level complaints, such as dog fouling and littering**	

Areas of particular focus to CSPs going forward within their Local Authority area and out with were (see diagram to the right).

We asked about **changes in working practices, positive or negative**, either in respondent's own teams or organisations or other teams during this time

General changes to working practices	Positive changes to keep for longer-term practice	Negative changes to let go of	'Old' ways of working to let go of in the future
• Home working • Move towards a demand management approach • Better use of technology to connect with partners, clients and other agencies • Partners more willing to do joint working without the bureaucracy of paperwork. • Relationships have improved with a shared sense of goals, understanding and trust. • Creative thinking to overcome challenges.	• Greater and swifter partnership working • Streamlined referrals and quicker decision making • More joint working, closer relationships and shared practice • Better use of remote working and video conferencing practices • Collaborative & creative thinking • Flexibility in managing employees, responsiveness and working times. • Delivering training virtually as part of a blended model.	• The need for food hubs • No face-to-face contact	• Structures and amount of reporting • Rigid thinking around work practices (including working from home and in-person meetings and office environments) • Slow bureaucratic processes and decision-making • Only providing staff with IT in the office.

It is **encouraging to see CSPs identify such clear areas for positive change**. We would stress that the temptation to return to old ways will be strong and it will take a concerted effort and commitment to hold on to these areas. Again, we would **recommend taking the time as a CSP to reflect on 'what worked' and how to mainstream these changes**. There will no doubt also be learning for Chief Executives, CoSLA, and Community Planning Partnerships from this type of exercise too.

Support

Finally, we asked our survey participants which out of the below would be most useful to them during this time. **Virtual regional meeting (CSP leads) and themed webinars with expert speakers** were equally most popular, followed by a discussion forum (CSP leads and others) and lastly, a working group/co-inquiry group. All respondents said Microsoft Teams was the best method of communication.
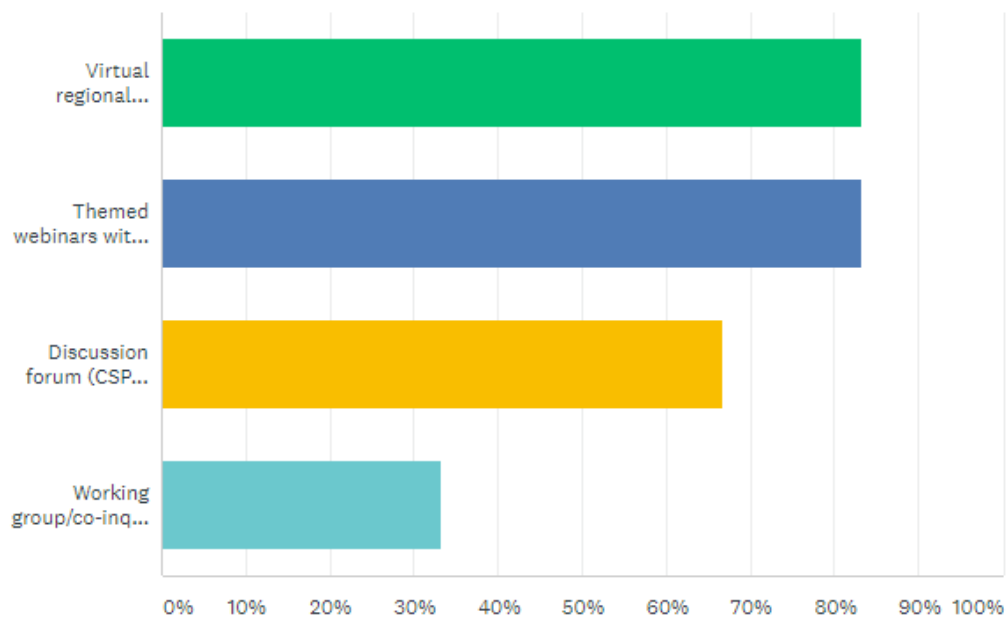
Since this survey, SCSN have **engaged in a number of CSP Leads meetings** and we are in the process of **designing some future webinars**. We continue to summarise and **publicise a range of other relevant webinars**.

Concluding Remarks

We can see that since our initial survey in April/May, **most CSPs have returned to meetings now, albeit in a different form**. Many community safety workers have returned from redeployment, however lots remain working from home and feel they have **adapted to the 'new normal'**. Issues around technology have, in the main, progressed. Service delivery is still mostly remote but **some authorities are beginning to start up services again**. Little to no face-to-face contact remains challenging for the workforce in terms of service delivery and staff wellbeing.

In many cases, **partnership work continues to thrive under the 'new normal'**, especially where there was an established partnership already. Nevertheless, there is lot of **variation in the individual experience of the pandemic for each CSP, which will require tailored support from national partners**.

Anti-social behaviour, social distancing concerns, and environmental issues such as fly-tipping remain as issues of concern however, domestic violence, mental health and sight of inequalities have been highlighted as the three main long-term issues.

There are **clear changes to the 'new normal' that CSPs wish to keep a hold of going forward**. Most notably, greater partnership working, less bureaucracy and more flexibility and responsiveness. SCSN would encourage CSPs also to strongly consider maintaining new links made throughout the pandemic.

The uncertainty around future funding and potential cuts remain a concern, however the **worth of community safety and its workforce has undoubtedly been showcased and proven more than ever during the continuing crisis**.