

'Build Back Better' Open Space Online

Hosted by Greater Manchester Social Enterprise Network (GMSSEN) Leadership group

Date: Wednesday 15th July, 10.30am-12.00pm. Venue: Online

GMSSEN



Summary Report

Of the 27 people that registered to attend we got 21 participants on the day, from a diverse range of backgrounds and sectors, some old friends and some new to GMSSEN. Cross sector representation including public, private and VCSE sectors and attendees spanning 8/10 Greater Manchester Boroughs enriched the insights discussion. The meeting was facilitated by Jez Hall of [Shared Future CIC](#) with invaluable support from Owen Hewson of GMCVO and Nickala Torkington of [Flourish Together CIC](#). Technical support was provided by Jayne McFadyen of Shared Future CIC.

Preparing to meet:

Every participant was sent a 3 page agenda, information on how to join a zoom meeting and the opportunity to propose a topic for discussion. On the day we agreed 7 discussion groups, in two rounds. People were asked to consider the brief framing statement below, read the [Build Back Better in GM](#) press release, and focus during the meeting on the overall question:

'When building back better, how does taking a social economy focus create more resilient communities in Greater Manchester?'

You can read the context setting statement below:

Planning for Recovery and Renewal

The response from local communities, anchor organisations and social enterprises to the COVID-19 crisis has been remarkable, immediate and agile. There are countless examples of social economy organisations taking the lead in providing support and reaching those most in need. Collaborations, relationships and connections between local government, statutory partners, social economy organisations and grassroots communities have been re-invigorated. Partnership working which previously may have taken months, if not years, to build has accelerated at pace through a collective response to COVID-19. The GM Mayor and Greater Manchester Local Economic Partnership has launched a 'Build Back Better' campaign. There is an appetite, expectation and willingness that these relationships and the shared actions and power which have emerged should be sustained in the longer term. They are inviting organisations across Greater Manchester to contribute. We want this participant-led Open Space to think that through and work out: **how the social economy contributes to Covid19 recovery.**

Participants were encouraged to take written notes though a shared google document.

Jez Hall has used these to create summaries below, with simple re-editing to (hopefully) capture and clarify the conversations.

The degree of detail depended on the discussion host and note-taker working together, with some participants adding more extensive written comment after the discussion.

These offer a launch-pad for further debate, events and to influence wider strategic conversations.

Notes of the discussion groups

How do or how are we creating a thriving social economy in or across Greater Manchester?

- 1. Where is the evidence that we are creating a strong social economy?** Those in 'the know' can access this information (such as the New Economy research a few years ago, the State of the Sector GM borough reports and Social Enterprise UK data.) But what is currently known, where are the gaps and how are we communicating this to public, private and VCSE audiences? We should not create data for data's sake and make sure there is a purpose and action-oriented end goal for this.
- 2. We believe the Corporate and Public sector want to play a role in building a strong social economy.** For example, by buying from SE. But don't know how or where to find social enterprises offering mentoring, enterprise or leadership support. There is a need to:
 - Improve the GMSSEN directory and promote it if this is going to be a directory of choice. This may need potential investment and focus as currently managed in a minimal way by GMCVO - how do we broaden this out? - can the GMSSEN spend some focussed time/ create task days to heavily improve the content/use/promotion of this and can some resources be secured to evolve this?
 - Understand links and access to the national SEUK directory
 - Be a will from both VCSE, Private and Public sector to want to create 'Meet the Buyer events' these could happen virtually to start with.
- 3. Communication and opportunities to showcase and engage are lacking.** A real education piece is needed to help the private and public sector better understand what the VCSE is, does and has to offer. Plus there are many people within the VCSE sector who don't understand the spectrum of the work, impact and opportunities in which they operate. Suggestions to help with this included:
 - Meet the Buyer events that showcase the range of SEs (e.g. Catering, Cleaning, Transport, Clothing, Counselling & Health/Wellbeing services)
 - Remembering to highlight that, as opposed to simply needing mentoring themselves, the VCSE sector have a broad range of training and consultancy expertise to sell to other businesses, industries and sectors (on innovation, enterprise, leadership, inclusion, wellbeing, employability)
 - A communications taskforce to improve information, case studies, social media strategy
 - A reminder that there are no resources to achieve this and we are relying on good will and collaboration
 - Podcasts which are well promoted to showcase, inform and educate.
- 4. Many of the social enterprises who are thriving and surviving through COVID are those who have a significant income from grants.** The model that Social Enterprises must be trading 30-50% is being tested at the moment and more discussion, research and

understanding is needed around this. Grants should not be seen as a dirty word or false economy and part of a well-blended income mix.

5. Through the pandemic there are multiple and mixed opportunities causing confusion:

- Lots of volunteers and new mutual aid coming forward - alongside many existing volunteer hubs.
- Businesses, corporates and people furloughed or made redundant wanting to offer professional skills and support to 'Charities' and VCSE - how do we make the most of this, whilst not abusing volunteering and also recognising that many VCSE organisations have highly skilled people operating them who are experts in their own right and that this is not a 'needy' sector. They just need support.
- Many of those organisations who stayed open during lockdown and who continue to provide services to those most vulnerable are agile, innovative VCSE organisations. Shining more of a spotlight on this and highlighting their leadership and sustainability will be key, alongside highlighting their individual difficulties and crises.

6. Can we find ways to spot and solve problems collectively through support and networking? To do this it would be really useful to have a 'Producer' and a 'Director' to signpost Social Enterprises to collaborate where crossovers and needs are identified. My thoughts are, a producer would research and gather information of the problems faced within GM and a Director would bring SE together to fulfil those needs. For example, young men feeling isolated, who may be low-skilled or having mental health issues with barriers to work, could be linked up with social enterprises like HAVE Homes or some of the catering social enterprises to get involved in initiatives and programmes of volunteering to help them back into work.

- Budget may be needed to do this consistently and have a broker of opportunities of active community connectors or talent scouts.
- In the short term SEs can network with one another to spot partnership opportunities and apply for training and development grants or projects/COVID response grants eg. WEA, Lottery or a SE Support Fund
- Informal troubleshooting peer learning events could be facilitated (on whose time?)

How do social housing providers (and others) work to support or repurpose buildings to enable social enterprises?

- 1. How to secure the housing to develop?** People are not wanting to buy properties because there is too much investment needed (meaning they wouldn't be able to get a mortgage on the property). Can we build back better through four pillars?
 - health and wellbeing,
 - aspiration and opportunity,
 - value, both social and economic,
 - education and individual growth.

With development done on prices set with the council rather than through social value models? In ways that discourage landlords who could undercut social providers or buy out the properties after renovated or built. Do planning frameworks need to be revised?

2. **It remains financially difficult for housing providers when trying to do the right thing and deliver what is needed in our communities.** Jigsaw Housing association, for example, has recently brought 24 houses back into use. They want to create stability in deprived neighbourhoods, and to bring local people in to do the work to a high quality. Are there ways to get local people who may be losing their jobs into opportunities to re-train, and thereby create more health and wellbeing? Housing is meant to be somewhere to flourish. We should be creating homes (new and old) fit for purpose and for modern forms of living. We should value prevention and having good health through such a focus on up-skilling and re-education. That might help with reducing the inequality in our communities. Helping them to mix more too, to produce the best social and economic outcome.
3. **We can encourage better behaviours by living in better properties.** People need houses, and they need income. If we build the houses without offering the matching support and economic benefits, people won't have the opportunity to gain a trade or access education. For a simple example, having two weeks work experience along with a qualification.
4. **What about community hubs?** Funding could be directed towards renovating buildings, which as community hubs, which grow small social economy community groups to offer more services in the area. Can social housing providers provide support to keep a community asset or premises going? Even though we can go online for a time we need to build our outreach services, and that means we need to help keep the buildings 'ready to open' for when people are 'ready to return'.
5. **Regenerating the high street:** We need a wider conversation which goes beyond housing and brings social enterprises needing premises into the mix. Flourish (amongst others) are exploring high street regeneration models which combine repurposing redundant space into social enterprise, alongside commercial and residential mixed use, to create local assets and amenities and create affordable housing security for women and families who don't currently have this. Still very early stage but something Flourish are serious about the need for and carrying out early stage feasibility research.
6. **Retail food businesses as regeneration agents:** Look at how some amazing social enterprise cafes, catering and food businesses (many of whom have had a particularly difficult experience of Covid-19) can play a role in attracting community groups to use them, support them, as well as them driving residential and commercial repurposing. We need better integrated regeneration strategies.
7. **What has worked well and what could we do more of?** The Greater Manchester Housing Providers have 25 offices across Manchester, looking for how we can help support community buildings and housing. Suggested actions include: Surveying and estate management skills for community buildings. There are technical skills that housing

associations have access to, but no community building network that covers Greater Manchester, or a network for supporting social enterprise asset managers. We feel this is a hole in the system.

How do we aggregate discussions from social entrepreneurs and enterprises to bring [first] to the GMSE advisory group for [forwarding to] the GMCA?

- 1. The GMSEN openly supports the Greater Manchester Social Enterprise Advisory (SEAG) Group and a third of SEAG reps are part of GMSEN Leadership Group.** The GMSEN Leadership Group are happy to help facilitate constructive and creative conversations and cascade surveys or whatever is needed to bring voices, insights and discussion in. The notes from this event and 2-3 subsequent ones in development over the coming year, can help support this and we have already openly offered space and invitation to SEAG colleagues to use these kinds of open space forums and other events to maximise energy, efforts and resources in the hope that the SEAG can result in a strategic shift. Some of the SEAG working groups could buddy up with relevant people within the GMSEN to create wider reach, info and operational energy.
Current working groups are headed up by the following:
Research & Intelligence - Lauren Coulman
Market Opportunities & Procurement - Liz Allen & Scott Darraugh
Investment - Gary Millar
Awareness Raising - Grace Dyke
- 2. The social enterprise advisory group at GMCA is a really positive development.** The challenge now is bringing in more voices.
- 3. Key challenge remains in reaching out and connecting with social enterprises:** finding out what they want to do, and bringing their voices into the discussion
- 4. Common view is that the key part is a more diverse representation.** That doesn't mean you have to have everyone's view. That's not possible. What you need is to make sure different groups are represented (e.g. BAME-led social enterprises)
- 5. Transparency is key.** We need to build trust into the social economy, and accountability, so people know who is speaking on their behalf. That takes time.
- 6. There do seem to be divisions within the social enterprise world in GM which are hard to overcome.** We need to focus on the things that unite rather than focusing on the differences.
- 7. In terms of aggregating discussions, maybe this should be the focus of a separate event.** Of all the groups working in social enterprise across GM (SEAG, GMSEN, different local authorities), how do we make best use of our collective knowledge and gather the insights together?

If we could leverage £1m to support the GM social economy to build back better... what would we do with this money?

1. **In an ideal world:** we would have a situation where the 3rd sector could tell funders how their money can best be spent - rather than Social Enterprises having to tick funders boxes.
2. **Can we provide money that funds leaders of social enterprises:** to work on business development, so they aren't chasing money and contracts elsewhere. They need access to money that gives them space and time to develop further work.
3. **Ideas for how development funding might be used include:**
 - **Evidence what social enterprises are doing, the impact and value they create and the case to invest in the social economy.** Invest in a collaborate research initiative (led by the SE sector who already have quality SV consultancies within it) to both upskill the VCSE sector in social value research whilst at the same time create the evidence base needed and potentially a joint series of key value indicators the social enterprise sector reports back on where it has budget and capacity.
 - **Showcase, raise awareness and improve the communications of the VCSE sector** - conversations today again show we are way under the radar, private sector/ public sector and the VCSE themselves are not clear on what social enterprises are, do, how/where they access support of quality and how to engage/access services or buy from them. Investing in training (from social enterprise Media & PR agencies) to upskill the sector whilst creating a joint comms strategy and effective case studies which can be sent out across a range of media channels and audiences is key. Plus building and promoting an effective directory (potentially building on the GMSEN directory) to showcase and promote SEs and where to buy/engage with them.
 - **Buy Back Better Roadshow** - once we have trialled a buy back better event eg. September looking at creating a borough to borough or sector to sector roadshow
 - **Invest in and highlight with pride the amazing social leaders we have across GM who have been excelling at social innovation, entrepreneurship leadership and collaborative partnership working for years** - capacity build them, connect them and highlight their excellence to public and private sector so they actually respect our intelligence and integrity as business leaders. This could look like a support programme with 3 strands:
 - **Social Leadership Programme** (designed and led by the VCSE sector with input from Public/Private sector - broadened out a bit like GM Leaders or Common Purpose to have cross sector participants)
 - **Social Entrepreneurship Programme** delivered by the networks providing quality support to social entrepreneurs to help capacity build, sustain and grow their work to reach more people. This might include training, action learning, mentoring/shadowing and grant investment
 - **Social Innovation Programme** - an initiative which helps cross sector communities to learn how to troubleshoot and solve social and community issues large and small. Both to capacity build people on social innovation and collaborative working, facilitate events to

tease out and action plan routes and collaborations to solving problems and potential investment/ incentives to trial new ways of working.

- **Invest in an administration group, overarching network or new structure to manage what needs to be done** effectively, inclusively to deliver results. This probably needs to be done in a phased way over 2-5 years resulting in a Social Economy Support Agency which can deliver research and policy, training and capacity building initiatives, administer SE grants and investment and broker cross sector relationships to grow the social economy, build resilient communities and a flourishing environments.
- **Consider the appetite for a GM Social enterprise awards** and commission this to be co-designed and delivered.

Could we leverage a further £1-2m from the public, private and VCSE sector in the way this is all designed and delivered to help achieve the above and any other key needs, create grants, impact investments and look at the longer term?

How do we better communicate stories of social entrepreneurs and work together to have a collective, relevant and current voice across social media and other forms of communications?

1. Who's role is it to do this and where are people looking to stories, inspiration and information?

There seem to be several challenges:

- People don't know where to look and source information. The VCSE orgs are accused of not promoting themselves well enough, however there seems to be an education piece needed for those in the VCSE sector, those in the public and private sector and other interested parties on where the main 'Go to' places are to source info - this may need workshops/webinars, Media attention and community signposting champions to improve the situation. A recognition that lots of information, case studies and good practice are out there but people don't know about them, look at them, read them, use them etc.
- Local politics, inertia and years of underfunding SE infrastructure and capacity building has meant there is no one place or voice to churn out communications, case studies or even create a joint strategy. Some voices and resilient people and organisations have tried harder and spoken louder to try to get communications, case studies, research and information out, but this is often in a vacuum, accessed by a community of interest or has limited reach/capacity to reach mainstream awareness.
- There is a skills building exercise to capacity build VCSE organisations to be able to better communicate internally and externally to understand communications /marketing/media strategies and channels and to create engaging communications in bite size, digestible chunks - this comes with budget and time challenges and constraints!

2. Wants from the group:

- bite size, more frequent, digestible information rather than long newsletters which can be dry, very 2D and not easy to digest
- Communications, Marketing, Media, Social Media training.
- A single point for good quality up to date information - or a clearer picture on good sources of this.
- More unity from the VCSE sector so it understands what it is and how to communicate what it is, what it has to offer and how it creates impact to the private and public sector and some in the VCSE sector it just seems like a muddle.

How do we help small social enterprises to survive?

1. **Importance of sharing innovative practice with each other.** It is helpful, particularly if management are resistant, to share something that's worked well for another organisation (e.g. for what activities you might run safely in a socially-distanced way with beneficiaries)
2. **In these socially-distanced times:** any events that offer opportunities for problems to be shared and suggestions given from other SEs are to be welcome
3. **Some participants shared how they are now thinking of how best to 'pivot' their business after the end of furlough in October.** Anticipating that previous income streams (e.g. an events catering business) will see a big drop in demand. So what to do next that will be a better earner and still have social value?

Food Poverty - how do we tackle food and nutritional issues?

This group didn't take notes, but the overall flavour of the conversation was around the individual struggles of small organisations and individuals to connect, learn from best practice and provide access to basic food supplies for the most marginalised and needy individuals and families. Points were made around the crucial role of access to and knowledge about healthy food and good nutrition.

Appendix 1: Online Open Space Agenda and Timing.

Our overall framing question:

'When building back better, how does taking a social economy focus create more resilient communities in Greater Manchester?'

PROGRAMME: Please register and join the meeting from 10.20 am

10:30: Welcome (Jez Hall, Nickala Torkington and Owen Hewson)

Participants should introduce themselves by the chat function,
We will use polling to share who is in the meeting.

10.35: Testing re-naming yourself, breakout rooms and small group intros

10.40: Choosing our Open Space topics (Jez Hall)

Choose the most popular Breakout room topics of the submitted questions.

10.50: Open Space Round 1 (25 minutes)

11.15: Return to the main room (Jez Hall)

Selecting second round topic rooms.

11.20: Open Space Round 2 (25 minutes)

11.45: Discussion on key learning and next steps (Nickala Torkington)

Plus using chat to harvest additional written comments and a closing evaluation poll

12.00: Close

12.00-12.20: OPTIONAL Informal chat space. Not part of the meeting participants were able to stay online and get to know each other better if they wished.

Appendix 2: Online Participants

Name	Organisation
Aine Graven	Rochdale Boroughwide Housing Ltd
Anne-Marie Marshall	Salford CVS
Bethel Alloyda	Winners Chapel International Manchester
Clare Hales	Studio Serenity CIC
Craig Stone	Great Places
Georgios Konstantakopoulos	Manchester Social Entrepreneurs network
Haleh Moravej	MetMUnch
Jayne McFadyen	Shared Future CIC
Jeff Pond	Survivors Manchester
Jez Hall	Shared Future CIC
Julie Cartwright	Eurovia UK
Kate Downes	Back on Track
Matthew Suddart	GMCVO
Neil Clayton	Barclays Bank
Nickala Torkington	Flourish CIC
Owen Hewson	GMCVO
Phillip Worthington	Rochdale Boroughwide Housing Ltd
Rupa Shah Flynn	Faith Network for Manchester (FN4M)
Sally Lister	H.A.V.E. Homes CIC
Sarah Pearce	Action Together
Teun van Rooij	Manchester City Council