



Collaboration Fund Evaluation Report



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

May 2025

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Introduction

The Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) provided financial support to local councils in England to help contain the spread of COVID-19 and support local public health initiatives.¹ In Luton and Bedfordshire, this funding was allocated to the Bedfordshire and Luton Community Foundation (BLCF), which set up the Community Recovery Fund (CRF).

An underspend from the CRF was used to set up a Collaboration Fund, which ran from January 2023 to June 2024. This new fund was designed to strengthen partnerships within Luton’s Voluntary, Community, Social and Faith Enterprise (VCSFE) sector to take a more strategic approach to tackling health inequalities by working collaboratively.

Funding was targeted at improving outcomes for marginalised and vulnerable communities in Luton, with a specific focus on residents identifying as Black Caribbean, Black African, South Asian, and other minority ethnic groups. It also supported those classified as clinically extremely vulnerable.²

By supporting strategic collaboration in a typically competitive sector, the funding aimed to promote a more unified and coordinated approach to tackling deep-rooted local health disparities.

This report presents the impact, effectiveness and sustainability of the Collaboration Fund during this period.

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1 COMF funding was generally targeted at areas with consistently high infection and enduring transmission rates.

2 The term ‘clinically extremely vulnerable’ (CEV) refers to individuals who are at a very high risk of severe illness from specific conditions, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. This group includes those with serious medical conditions affecting the immune system, respiratory system, or other critical functions.

Key findings

The Collaboration Fund broadly met its aims and objectives, particularly in supporting women and communities who were disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. However, it fell short of reaching a representative number of individuals from Black, Asian, and minority ethnic backgrounds.

The grant was effectively used to foster collaboration between VCSFE sectors, enabling outreach and service delivery in accessible community spaces, and enhancing organisational capacity through training and shared resources. These partnerships enabled creative

and multilingual engagement that improved access and well-being for target groups, though challenges around sustainability, accessibility, and equitable engagement remain.

Overall, the grant highlighted the VCSFE sector's vital role in reducing health inequalities and reinforced the importance of co-designed, community-based approaches. While collaboration proved impactful, its continuation is uncertain without sustained funding and a supportive environment that enables collaborative working.





What was said



Recommendations

IMPACT

- An underrepresentation of service users from Black, Asian, and minority ethnic groups across lead and partner organisations due to:
 - community stigma against seeking help.
 - communication and language barriers between service providers and service users.

- Increase the representation of service users from Black, Asian, and minority ethnic groups across Luton by:
 - increasing the ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity of staff and volunteers.
 - making more use of existing interpretation services.
 - continuing to increase creative engagement, e.g., gaming nights, social gatherings, and community volunteering.

EFFECTIVENESS

- Outreach events experienced low footfalls in community centres compared to usual venues because of:
 - poor visibility/advertising of outreach activities in community centres.
 - poor accessibility for some service users, e.g., people with physical disabilities and neurodiversity needs.

- Increase the footfall for outreach activities by:
 - expanding service delivery in public spaces e.g., the Luton mall.
 - working in partnerships with organisations that have well-attended events.
 - improving the visibility and accessibility of services/events taking place in different locations across Luton.
 - taking a flexible approach to improving accessibility for people with physical disabilities and neurodiversity needs.

- A lack of inclusive and comfortable spaces for people with neurodiversity needs, such as quiet and uncrowded spaces, therefore:
 - some service users felt uncomfortable communicating their issues to service providers.

- Create more inclusive and comfortable spaces for people with neurodiversity needs by:
 - sharing resources such as private and confidential rooms with other lead and partner organisations that may need them.

SUSTAINABILITY

- There is a lack of opportunities to sustain working collaboratively, because:
 - it is harder to find funding sources that emphasise or support collaboration to the same extent as the Collaboration Fund.
 - it is difficult to sustain collaborative outreach with time-limited funding.

- Create more opportunities to sustain collaborative working by:
 - increasing opportunities for VCSFE organisations to identify and apply for funding that supports collaborative working.
 - continuing to develop and widen networks with the VCSFE sector to encourage collaborative outreach activity.
 - co-creating and publishing an accessible directory or online page with brief descriptions of all VCSFE organisations in Luton and their services.
 - circulating this directory across Luton's VCSFE sector will enhance the visibility of their services, build stronger collaboration between organisations and support more effective use of existing funding opportunities.

Organisations involved

Lead organisation	Partner organisations			
	1	2	3	4
Azalea	Stepping Stones	Signposts	Hope Church	
Citizens Advice Luton	Luton Law Centre	Luton Rights	Luton Irish Forum	Level Trust
Disability Resource Centre	Sight Concern	Community Needs	One Stop Advice	
Luton Christian Fellowship	Level Trust	Stepping Stones		
Luton Foodbank	Inspire FM	Tokko	Empowering Education	



Evaluation

The evaluation assessed the impact, effectiveness, and sustainability of the Collaboration Fund. It focused on:

IMPACT

Examined the extent of the grant's impact by analysing:

- Who the service users were (gender, ethnicity, and type of user)
- The number of people supported by each project
- Where service users lived (based on postcodes).

EFFECTIVENESS

Assessed how well the grant reduced health inequalities by reviewing:

- Accessibility of services (e.g., timings, language, and cultural suitability)
- Improvements in service users' health and well-being
- Project leads' insights on how their services addressed health inequalities.

SUSTAINABILITY

As the Collaboration Fund was a one-off grant, the evaluation explored how organisations planned to sustain their services and collaborative work to continue reducing health inequalities after the end of the grant.



There were three phases of the evaluation:

1

Scoping phase



- Review of documents from lead and partner organisations
- Reflective diary from staff

2

Implementation phase



- Quantitative data
- Interviews with project leads and project managers from lead and partner organisations, respectively
- Focus group discussions and interviews with service users
- Case studies from lead and partner organisations

3

Synthesis phase



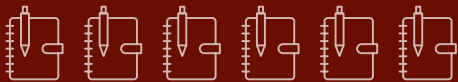
- Combining and integrating the findings from the scoping and implementation phases

What did we do?

5 Lead organisation quantitative reports



6 Staff reflective diaries



5 End of Grant (EOG) reports



4 Interviews with project leads



9 Interviews with project managers



23 Lead and partner organisation case studies



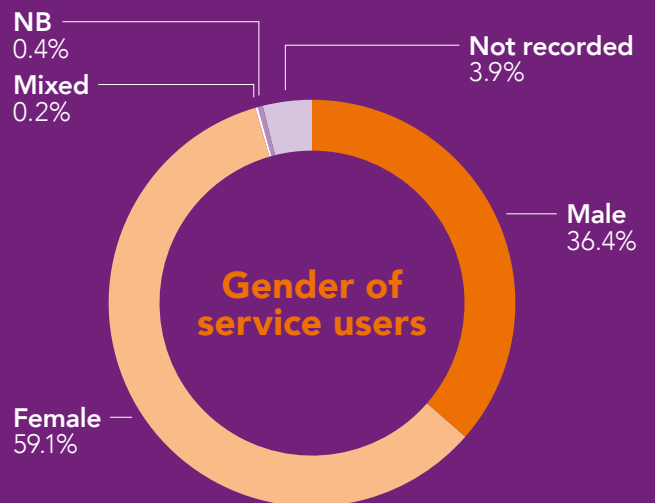
2 Service user focus groups

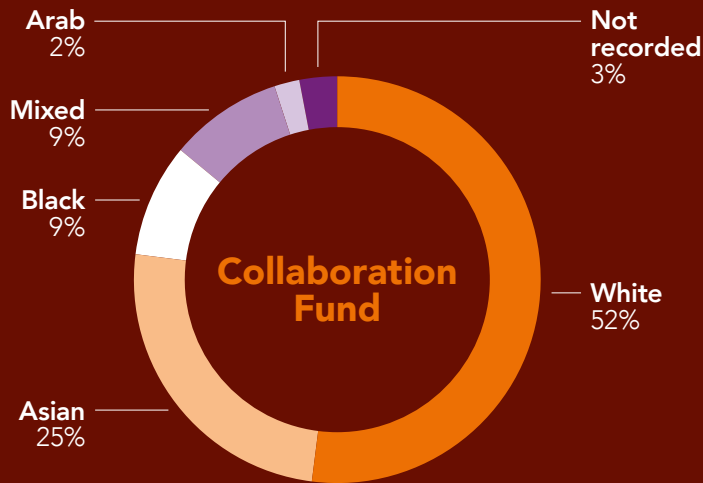


5 Service user interviews



service users

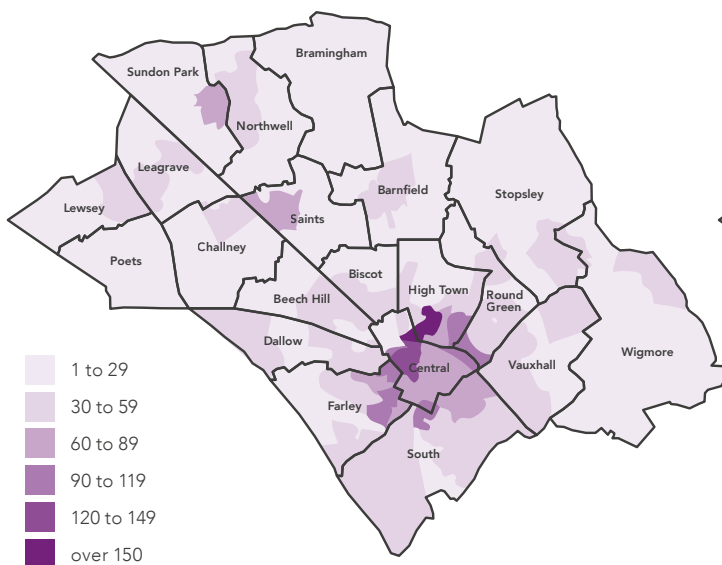




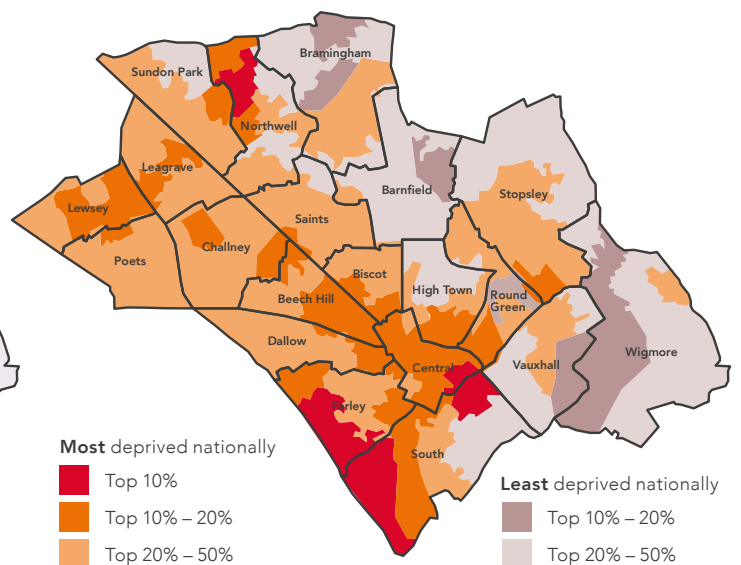
The majority of service users were concentrated in Central and South Luton.

The distribution of service users closely aligns with the 2019 Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) revealing that there are notable similarities that highlight the correlation between service usage and areas of higher deprivation.

Geographical locations (by LSOA) of all the services users who received services under the CRCF grant



2019 Index of Multiple Deprivation for Luton by LSOA



Findings

Themes identified from document reviews, case studies, interviews with lead and partner organisations and staff reflective diaries.

Strengths and challenges of working collaboratively

Strengths

Collaborative working enabled organisations to expand networks, share resources, co-design services, and reach wider audiences, allowing for holistic and consistent support for service users, ultimately improving access and wellbeing.

During a recent parent chat session, the [community link worker] supported a mum who wanted some advice regarding toilet training. They were able to register mum with [another partner organisation] there and send her our pre-recorded toilet training workshop which she could access at home... The mum was thankful for the information.

Lead Organisation 2

Each partner brought unique strengths, enhancing service delivery through diverse expertise, while the co-location of services increased accessibility, and flexible grant use enabled tailored local partnerships.

We have undertaken various health promotion initiatives through social media with one of our partner organisations. Another has played a significant role in disseminating health-related information to a wide audience, including tips on healthy eating, exercise, and accessing healthcare services. And another has facilitated workshops on healthy eating on a budget, cooking demonstrations, and other practical skills that promote health and well-being.

EoG Report, Lead Organisation 5

Lead organisations were able to expand their networks, strengthening relationships with familiar organisations and building connections with new ones.

The Collaboration Fund has led to some of our most successful groups and events with partners that we simply didn't know about before the project began...

EoG Report, Lead Organisation 4

Sharing diverse skills and expertise created a more impactful service network, while outreach activities delivered collaboratively enabled service users to access multiple services in one location e.g. community halls and churches.

Bringing everybody together, we were able to brainstorm different ideas... gave us ideas how we could... get support from other organisations, how they can help us.

Project Manager 9, Partner Organisation 5.3

While the Collaboration Fund had clear objectives, lead organisations had the flexibility to collaborate with partners that best addressed local community needs.

The... flexibility of the funding meant that we could try a multitude of different groups and events to see what the local community wanted and needed.

EoG Report, Lead Organisation 4

A dedicated point of contact from BLCF was key in maintaining focus, addressing issues efficiently, and ensuring project goals were met.

When working with the collaboration fund, having [staff name] to contact with any issues about the funding made it so much easier to understand what was being asked.

EoG Report, Lead Organisation 1

Lead and partner organisations were able to share resources, including venue spaces for delivering services that required private rooms.

... an example where this worked well was when [partner organisations] lacked private rooms, [lead organisation] were able to provide a private and confidential space to meet with clients. Future opportunities for this could be explored.

Project Lead 1

Challenges

Pre-existing partnerships sometimes reduced the perceived value, while overlapping expertise sometimes limited referrals and impact. Poor communication from leads to partners and unclear funding priorities caused frustration, and misunderstandings about staff roles persisted, despite efforts to clarify them.

One of the primary difficulties encountered was how the job role was mis-interpreted by both organisations and clients. Organisations often mistook the role as being a crisis support worker...

EoG Report, Lead Organisation 1

A lack of communication between the lead organisations and the partner organisations regarding funding, often made the partner organisations feel as though they were working in isolation.

... we put trust in our lead organisation to communicate well to us. They didn't do that... now we're having to suddenly scurry around to... meet the requirements...

Project Manager 8, Partner Organisation 5.2

The change in funding priorities at the start of the process was confusing and frustrating for project managers as they felt their time had been wasted.

... we were asked to do a funding application. That's a time investment and then... the funding officer... was like, oh, we're not going to do that... Then all those ideas were thrown out the door...

Project Manager 6, Partner Organisation 3.3

Skill improvement and training needs

Alongside working collaboratively in the community, the training delivered by the Young Foundation and Luton Borough Council offered opportunities for lead organisations to build the capacity and skills of their employees and volunteers.

They... offered training to ensure they [i.e., volunteers] were equipped with good boundaries when dealing with these complex issues. This helped them to offer support in a safe, consistent way that could be sustained long term.

EoG Report, Lead Organisation 1

By using a supervision style of training, staff were supported to understand service users' complex emotional and mental health issues.

Throughout the year... 18 hours of supervision from... an experienced clinical supervisor... allowed for direct feedback for handling challenging situations.

EoG Report, Lead Organisation 1

Burden of reporting

The extent of the reporting required was highlighted to be time consuming and resource intensive, which took away from the priority of delivering services in the community.

The reporting can be time consuming, and this is challenging for organisation and takes away from front line provision particularly for smaller partners.

Staff 4, Partner Organisation 3.3

There's a lot more reporting which stops us doing some of the good work that we should be doing if we have more funding.

Project Lead 2, Lead Organisation 3

There were also privacy concerns about data sharing, and challenges with recording case studies that could demonstrate service users' personal stories of change.

There was a real hesitancy from attendees towards sharing personal information. Though we explained that it was all anonymised, it still impacted their experience of coming to events.

EoG Report, Lead Organisation 1

Sustainability of working collaboratively

The strong professional relationships developed through collaboration often continued beyond the funding period, with ongoing referrals between organisations.

We have built... really good professional relationships with our partners, and even though the Collaboration Fund has now come to an end, we have continued to work with partners, ongoing in other ways.

EoG Report, Lead Organisation 2

Sustainability was supported by resource sharing, long-term planning, regular evaluations, and exploring new funding opportunities. Continuing established partnerships and securing additional funding were seen as essential for expanding service reach and ensuring ongoing accessibility for service users.

If we were to be granted new funding, we could expand the service and triple the outcomes!

EoG Report, Lead Organisation 2

However, there were sometimes challenges in sustaining the same level of collaboration work as during the grant period, due to funding and resource constraints making some of the outreach services untenable.

The issue with sustainability...is they haven't got any funding for any outreach activities... If we were a big organisation and had more staff, it is more viable. But with our existing staff numbers and funding we would just end up spread too thinly...

Project Manager 4, Partner Organisation 3.1

Inclusive engagement and staff retention

Delivering creatively engaging gender-specific activities was identified as increasing the reach and inclusivity of the services provided.

We offered free art therapy workshops for women exclusively... Many reported that it was not just carrying out the creative activities, but the provision of a safe and welcoming women's only space that enhanced their wellbeing.

EoG Report, Lead Organisation 4

The importance of staff retention was particularly important for organisations supporting service users with traumatic experiences, as the frequent changes in staff meant they had to re-tell their traumatic stories time and again.

One of the big barriers to support was the risk of re-traumatisation with retelling their stories... The... officers change regularly... and they [i.e., service users] have to repeat traumatic stories again and again to receive support. Having a long-term consistent individual who can offer support whilst being familiar with their background and trauma history would be helpful...

EoG Report, Lead Organisation 1

Need for more networking opportunities

Networking between organisations was a real benefit for some, while others identified a definite need for more relationship building and knowledge sharing.

An area we could have allocated more time to as lead partner was developing the partnerships we established at the start of the project...this would have allowed us to share learnings...

EoG Report, Lead Organisation 3

Project leads and project managers did highlight that the Fairness Taskforce – a community group that works to address inequality and structural barriers – enabled them to widen their networks.

There were a lot of similar faces at the Fairness Taskforce event. And, you know, if you're not taking every single contact away, at least you're taking two to three contacts away and then you're arranging meetings and then, you know what everybody else is doing.

Project Manager 9, Partner Organisation 5.3

However, attending Fairness Taskforce meetings was highlighted by project leads as taking significant time away from their day-to-day operations, hindering their ability to fulfil regular duties. As an alternative, they suggested creating a directory with a 50-word summary of each VCSE sector in Luton, outlining their services.

Well, just letting staff go for a day seminar, I can't remember what they called them, a workshop... That's a lot of time out of day-to-day operations... it was an investment of our time. It was useful. And as I said, but equally it could have been not useful, a waste of our time... But it is one that not everyone would be in favour for.

Project Lead 1, Lead Organisation 2

Challenges with outreach activity

Despite significant investment, outreach events at community centres saw low attendance, raising concerns about their impact. In contrast, aligning with existing events or using high-footfall venues like malls was suggested as places for greater engagement, highlighting the value of strategic location and collaboration.

Maybe we should have been in the mall...I just didn't think that was the right approach... everyone from across Luton access the mall... and then it will be worth spending the 4-5 hours there because you're seeing so much public... But sitting in a community centre all day and no one knows about it, we're just wasting time.

Project Manager 3, Partner Organisation 2.3

Access to a wider section of the population – including the elderly, single mothers and the unemployed – was limited due to funding constraints. Outreach events could have helped them but needed to be held closer to their communities.

A lot of people... have financial difficulties to get to a particular location. So, if we could do it closer to them... it could possibly have been done had the funding allowed us to do that...

Project Manager 7, Partner Organisation 5.1

Facilitators of community engagement

Service users were often more engaged and likely to use services because of the organisations' reputations and the pre-existing trust that existed.

...we've no trouble with getting new clients to come and use our service. And if a client gets a good service, they'll often spread the word... Probably the most important thing to us is to maintain a good reputation.

Project Manager 6, Partner Organisation 3.3

The use of different media to share information was also effective.

...so we did show little videos to promote the actual activities before they took place... We did a face Facebook and YouTube live broadcast of the actual workshop itself, so others who are watching online can also benefit from the information given...

Project Manager 7, Partner Organisation 5.1

Barriers and enablers to inclusive service delivery

One of the challenges that arose was around the stigma associated with seeking help and fearing judgment from others. Some of the creative events provided helped to break this stigma, as did online sessions that could be joined anonymously.

The whole issue is around pride and people being too proud to ask for help... If I go to these kinds of things, people are going to judge me... Hence, we decided let's make it available on online as well... So those people who don't physically want to attend, but at least they can still benefit from the material.

Project Manager 7, Partner Organisation 5.1

Face-to-face interactions remained important for those who were not English speakers or tech-savvy, and the timing of services was crucial for enabling accessibility.

Some offices across the country don't provide face-to-face drop-in services anymore. We know that in Luton, that would never work... And the reason for that is that we get a lot of people in Luton that don't speak English and they're also not literate, so they can't use a computer. They can just use a phone.

Project Lead 2, Lead Organisation 3

Employing staff and volunteers from diverse backgrounds also made the services more inclusive, with the multi-lingual backgrounds of many staff members helping to overcome language barriers.

So, within our own team, we have got people that could speak the same language as some of the clients that came in. So, we were then able to translate and explain to the clients how the workshops were, and they really enjoyed it.

Project Manager 9, Partner Organisation 5.3

Fostering engagement and well-being through compassionate support

Non-judgmental support fostered trust and encouraged engagement, even among service users who faced significant barriers to accessing services, while recovery groups and one-to-one sessions improved the mental health and well-being of service users who had traumatic backgrounds.

A service user had been refusing mental health/practical support from services because her health has deteriorated. She was barred from one service due to her aggressive text messages. She has managed to remain in regular contact via text and phone calls with the [lead organisation 1] in spite of this... she mentioned that she was grateful for the support and not being seen through a negative lens.

Lead Organisation 1

Empowerment through skill development and community connection

Support from organisations empowered service users by building skills, confidence, and independence, improving well-being and career prospects. This also strengthened community ties, fostering belonging, purpose, and emotional resilience.

A single mother of two, was struggling to make ends meet after losing her job due to the pandemic. She felt overwhelmed and didn't know where to turn for help...With [the staff's] guidance, she was able to access the resources she needed to secure a new job and stabilise her family's finances.

Lead Organisation 5

Creative engagement

Creative services, including art therapy and gaming sessions, as well as group meetings and social events, provided safe spaces for service users and helped build meaningful connections while also reducing social isolation.

I really enjoyed art when I was younger but was not allowed to do it in Pakistan because of the culture I was not allowed to express myself, so I used to hide and do it, so when I went to art therapy with [partner organisation 4.2], I was nervous but I loved it because I completely forgot about my current home life... I would love to do it again. Since art therapy, I got the confidence to do other courses too.

Partner Organisation 4.2



Themes identified from focus groups and interviews with service users

The main themes that emerged from talking to service users were an increase in social confidence, challenges and benefits in terms of infrastructure and accessibility, and the referral system. There was also some general positive feedback.

Service users gained social confidence

The theme of social confidence highlights the transformative impact of social clubs, peer networks, and volunteering on service users. These opportunities fostered connections, reduced isolation, and rebuilt confidence, leading to personal growth and fulfilment.

Positive impact of social clubs and peer networks

Social clubs and group activities provided environments where service users could engage in arts, crafts, music, and social events. These supportive spaces helped reduce isolation, foster belonging, build confidence and offer emotional support and practical advice through peer networks like WhatsApp groups.

I got on to the craft club, because they've got arts and crafts clubs working that you could join... It's like, this is my... I'm gonna call it my happy place.

Service User 3, Partner Organisation 3.3

Benefits of volunteering

Volunteering was instrumental in helping service users rebuild confidence, particularly for those who had been unemployed or isolated. It offered fulfilment, personal growth, and a way to give back to the community.

Now I'm giving back to others, I think, helps people who they probably sometimes don't realise.

Service User 1, Partner Organisation 3.3

Overall, social clubs, peer networks, and volunteering provided service users with essential social connections, confidence, and a sense of purpose – helping them reclaim their independence and improve their wellbeing.

Infrastructure and accessibility

The impact of infrastructure and accessibility on service users focuses on challenges with relocation, unsuitable environments, and the benefits of supportive infrastructure.

Challenges with relocation

Service users faced significant challenges due to the relocation of services, particularly when accessibility to essential support was compromised. The move of a lead organisation away from Luton created difficulties for users who previously relied on a central, easily accessible location.

There should have been an office in Luton as well because lots of people in Luton used to use their services... They should be supported, like bring them back to where they were.

Service User 2, Lead Organisation 2

However, the accessibility of the Dunstable facility was appreciated for its inclusive design.

It's a wonderful place to go to... It's all ground floor level... and they're very welcoming there.

Service User 1, Partner Organisation 3.3

These experiences underscore the importance of considering accessibility needs when planning service locations, particularly for users who rely on public transport or have mobility challenges.

Challenges with an inappropriate environment

Service users with autism and multiple conditions struggled with noisy and crowded environments, which triggered sensory overload and heightened anxiety. The absence of quiet, private spaces made it difficult for them to communicate effectively.

When you asked to come down to the [lead organisation 2], and you've got autism, and you've got so many people there... the noise for me is just crazy, right. And I'm almost panicked that I can't even get my words out.

Service User 2, Lead Organisation 2

The lack of autism-friendly environments further compounded these challenges, highlighting the need for sensory-aware service design:

You have got to find a place where the person can calm down a little bit and get them to collect their thoughts... you can't hear yourself think.

Service User 1, Lead Organisation 2

These insights underscore the necessity of inclusive, accessible environments that cater to neurodiverse needs.

Supportive infrastructure

Internet café facilities were a valuable resource, providing access to the internet for job searching, digital engagement, and form completion, as well as a welcoming space for interaction.

They created an Internet club. You can now go and use their computers for search.

Service User 2, Partner Organisation 3.3

Overall, the infrastructure and accessibility theme highlights the importance of thoughtful service design to meet diverse needs, from inclusive environments and accessible locations to supportive digital resources.

Benefits and challenges of the referral system

Benefits of the referral system

The referral system played a crucial role in connecting service users with valuable resources, including job assistance, skill development, and social activities. Referrals provided access to opportunities that might not have been immediately available otherwise.

We attended [an outreach event] on a Wednesday afternoon...[with] one of the outreach workers... spent about 3/4 of the session actually in the same room talking to him about what could be provided and where we could do it. And then he actually put me in touch with the [lead organisation 2] centre.

Service User 1, Lead Organisation 2

Universal Credit was also noted as a useful mechanism for recommending relevant services:

Well, it has been recommended to me by Universal Credit... I think they have been recommending to various clients.

Service User 1, Partner Organisation 3.3

These examples demonstrate the potential of an effective referral system to improve access to services and provide meaningful support for personal development and well-being.

Challenges of the referral system

Despite its benefits, the referral system posed significant challenges for some service users. A major issue was inconsistent or ineffective referrals, leading to frustration when individuals were passed between organisations without clear outcomes.

They keep telling you, go back to [lead organisation 3]. The other one was, yeah, we don't do forms... they don't help you with reading and writing stuff. So where do you go?

Service User 2, Lead Organisation 2

There were also cases where organisations were unwilling or unable to help, leaving service users feeling unsupported.

I did ask for help from the [lead organisation 2], but they refused. They said they couldn't do that. And another friend of mine has kind of mentioned that the [partner organisation 3.3] ... they were like really happy to help.

Service User 2, Lead Organisation 2

While the referral system was beneficial in connecting some individuals with essential services, it was undermined by inconsistencies, lack of coordination, and inadequate follow-up. Strengthening the referral process to ensure reliability, appropriate matching, and better coordination across organisations is crucial for improving user experiences.

User feedback to lead and partner organisations

Positive feedback

Service users expressed deep appreciation for the support they received, particularly praising the kindness, sensitivity, and dedication of staff and volunteers. Many highlighted the welcoming environment and personal attention they experienced, which made them feel valued and supported.

It's an excellent service. I'll recommend it to anybody... they will do their utmost best to help you. If something is wrong or if they haven't seen you and you haven't contacted them or anything like that, they will call you to see if you're OK.

Service User 3, Partner organisation 3.3

Another service user praised the empathy and lived experience of the volunteers, which contributed to a compassionate and understanding environment.

They're amazing. They're very kind people. A lot of the volunteers have experienced problems one way or another in their lives, which kind of makes them... stay more sensitive to other people's problems...

Service User 1, Partner Organisation 3.3

Another user highlighted the organisation's inclusive nature and the commitment of staff to treating all service users equally.

Colour, creed, race. It doesn't matter who you are. They will help you once they can help you. That's extremely good service. Very helpful...

Service User 3, Partner Organisation 3.3

These accounts demonstrate the strong sense of community, care, and inclusivity fostered by the service providers, making them a trusted source of support for diverse groups.

Negative feedback

While the majority of feedback was positive, one service user shared a disappointing experience related to a lack of follow-through after a lengthy discussion about potential support. They described investing significant time in an initial meeting, only to be left without assistance due to funding limitations.

We spent two hours discussing what services they could offer, but then due to a funding change, they couldn't provide any support. After waiting for six weeks, I was told they couldn't offer anything due to changes in circumstances. It felt like a waste of time, and I received no follow-up.

Service User 1, Lead Organisation 2

Conclusion and next steps

The findings highlight both the successes and limitations of the funded initiatives. While the Collaboration Fund facilitated meaningful engagement, stronger partnerships, and improved service accessibility, there were challenges, such as the underrepresentation of certain groups, inconsistent data collection, outreach barriers, and sustainability concerns.

Importantly, the findings also underscore the vital role of the VCSFE sector in reducing health inequalities and supporting vulnerable communities, as well as emphasising the importance of ongoing collaboration, strategic funding, and inclusive service delivery.

To maintain momentum and build on the progress made, the next steps will focus on addressing gaps, enhancing accessibility, and ensuring that collaborative working remains a long-term priority beyond the Collaboration Fund period.

Recommendations for future actions:

- Increase collaboration with organisations whose staff reflect Luton's diversity to broaden reach and ensure services resonate with Luton's communities.
- Integrate creative activities to reduce stigma around seeking help and support and encourage wider service engagement.
- Expand outreach into high-footfall locations to boost awareness and visibility of collaborative services.
- Strengthen peer networks by investing in structured opportunities for relationship building and knowledge sharing across the sector.
- Co-develop a concise VCSFE directory featuring summaries of their services, reducing the need for time-intensive meetings and support more efficient information sharing.

Taking these steps will help ensure that collaborative working is inclusive and culturally competent. By embedding these recommendations into practice, partnerships can be strengthened and better positioned to address communities' diverse needs.

This approach will sustain collaborative efforts and ensure they continue to make a meaningful and lasting impact in tackling health and social care inequalities.



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Finally, we would like to thank Croft Design for their excellent work in the editing and design of this executive summary.



This is a summary report. If you would like to read the full report please visit:
www.beds.ac.uk/tlc-research/health-and-social-care-inequalities-projects/

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