

Coordinated
Community
Support.

Learning from the
CCS Programme



About the CCS Programme: Overview



- The Children's Society (TCS), delivered the Coordinated Community Support (CCS) Programme between 2019-2022.
- The Programme's goal was to improve coordination of local services to reduce repeat instances of financial crisis by addressing underlying causes of crises, as well as the immediate crisis.
- The CCS Programme worked in four local areas (Norfolk, Tower Hamlets, Oldham and Swansea) to improve coordination between locally-based statutory and voluntary agencies providing support (including grant support, advice, legal support, access to food and other services) to people in financial crisis.
- In each area the CCS team worked with local organisations to bring them together and take action on their coordination priorities.
- The programme also aimed to influence national, regional and local policy makers to understand the value of local coordination and provide funding for sustained coordination activity.

About the CCS Programme: Overview

The logo for Coordinated Community Support features the text "Coordinated Community Support." in a dark blue, sans-serif font. The text is enclosed within a square frame formed by thick, rounded lines in red and blue. The red line forms the bottom and left sides, while the blue line forms the top and right sides.

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- The background to the programme was the “Not Making Ends Meet” report, conducted by The Children’s Society with The Church of England in 2018 (1).
- This found that the first port of call for crisis support was often voluntary sector or other statutory services, rather than local welfare assistance schemes, and that families tended to “bounce around” different services trying but failing to access support.
- The CCS programme aimed to pilot approaches to improve local networking, and reduce repeat instances of financial crisis.

(1) <https://www.coordinatedcommunitysupport.org.uk/content/not-making-ends-meet-0>

About the CCS Programme: Overview

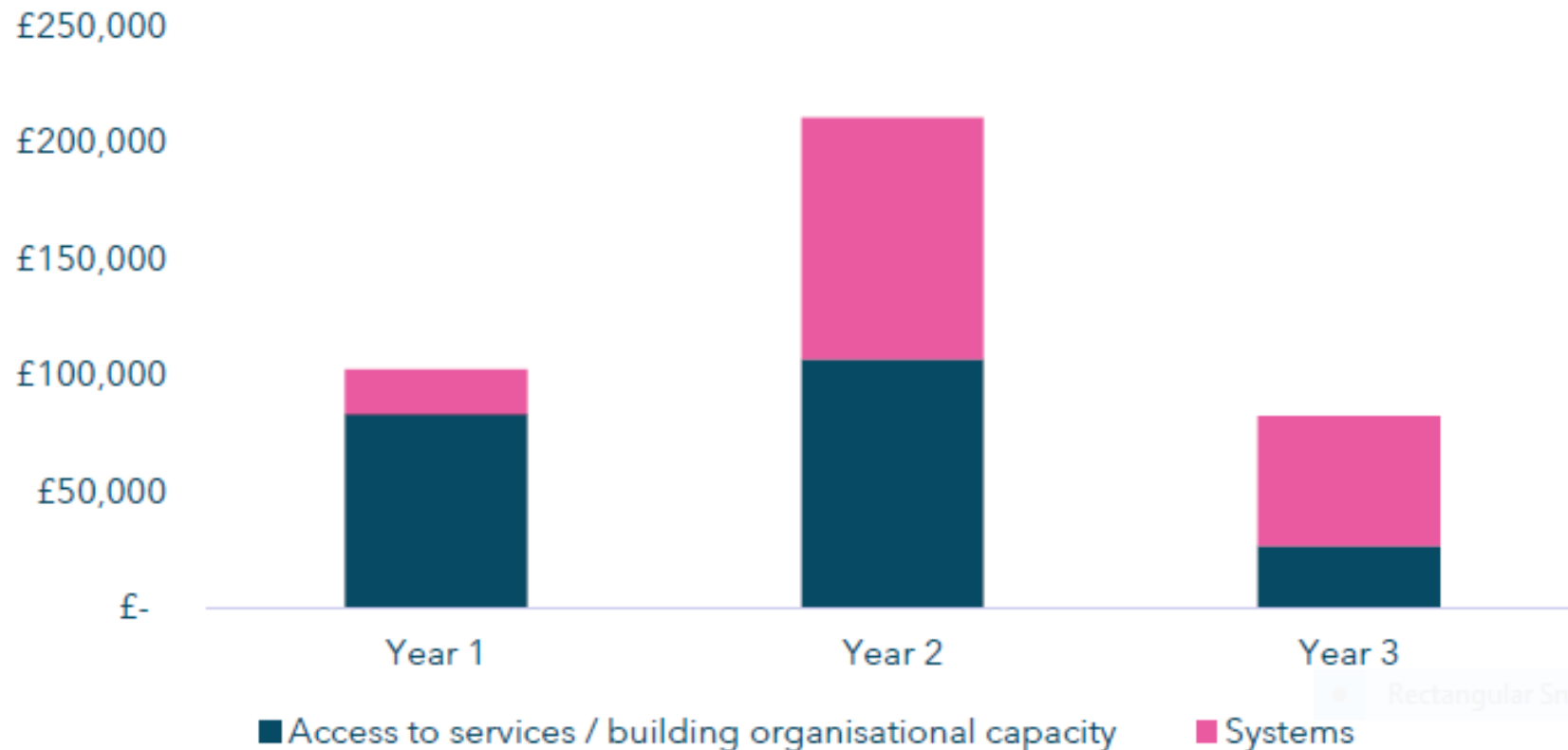


- The structure of the programme comprised:
 - A programme manager, and two programme officers, to support the pilot sites in enabling them to identify their priorities for coordination.
 - The CCS programme team also facilitated cross-site projects (such as the Smallwood small grants programme), and provided the link with the Children's Society policy teams to enable national influencing.
 - A programme learning coordinator whose role was to encourage the pilot sites to reflect on their own learning, to facilitate learning across the four pilot sites, and to lead on sharing learning beyond the programme
 - An external evaluation team (Cloud Chamber), providing annual evaluation reports against qualitative and quantitative outcome measures.



About the CCS Programme: Funding

Figure 2: Funding allocated by CCS Programme by year and focus area
(source: CCS team funding tracker)



Source:
Year 3
Evaluation
Report

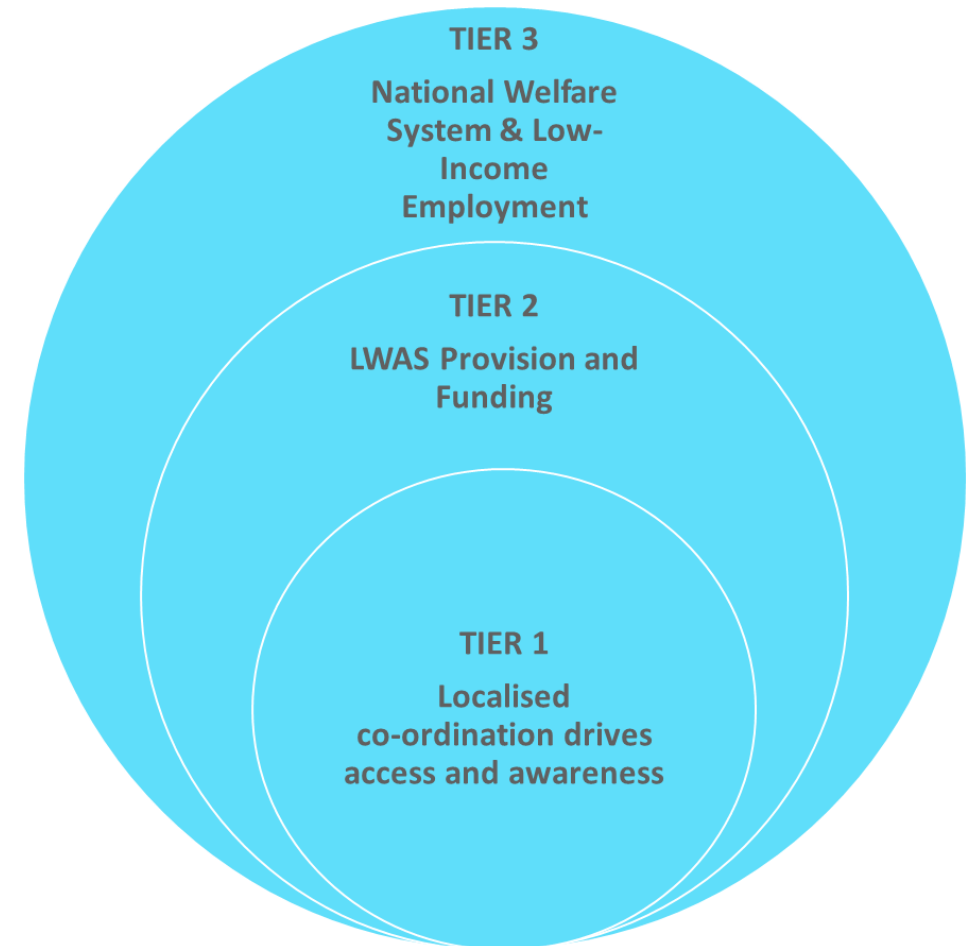
About the CCS Programme: Activity

- September 2019 – August 2020:
 - Engagement with local areas, connecting with or bringing together a local group of VCS organisations
 - Funding focused on crisis support during the pandemic
- September 2020 – August 2021:
 - Strengthening/ expanding the local networks, identifying key players
 - Expanding the pre-existing digital referral mechanism in Norfolk
 - Introducing digital referral mechanisms in Tower Hamlets & Oldham
- September 2021 – August 2022
 - Introducing a digital referral mechanism in Swansea/ Neath Port Talbot
 - Focusing on sustainability after the project ends in August

About the CCS Programme: Working at Three Tiers



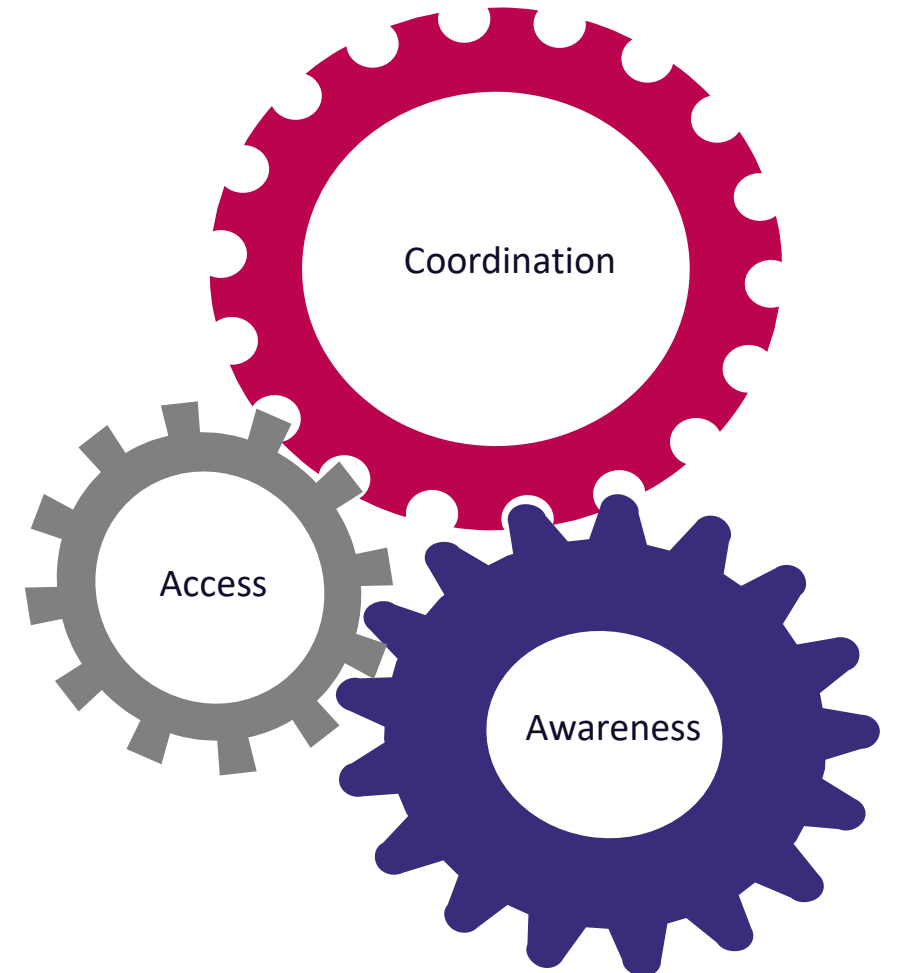
- The CCS Programme operated at three levels:
- Tier 1: Driving improved access to, awareness of and coordination of local services offering advice and support to those in financial crisis
- Tier 2: Developing and Connecting with LA-run Local Welfare Assistance Schemes (the Discretionary Assistance Fund (DAF) in Wales
- Tier 3: Influencing policy at national level – collecting evidence from the four sites and influencing national governments.



About the CCS Programme: Improving Access, Awareness & coordination

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- The “Access, Awareness, coordination” (AAC) model provided a conceptual framework for the programme:
 - People needing advice and support in a crisis need better **access** to services;
 - They and the professionals who work with them need better **awareness** of local services available;
 - Better **coordination** is the cog that drives better awareness and better access.



Key Features: A coordination Network & Digital Referral System



- In each of the four areas, coordination has taken the form of
 - A **network** of local organisations, meeting regularly, sharing information about services on offer and emerging issues. Most of these existed before CCS, and have expanded and developed through the programme.
 - A **digital referral system**, allowing VCS and statutory organisations to refer people to each other's organisations. This existed in Norfolk, and has started in the other three sites by the CCS Programme.



CCS Programme Evaluation: KPIs

- Initial Programme KPIs

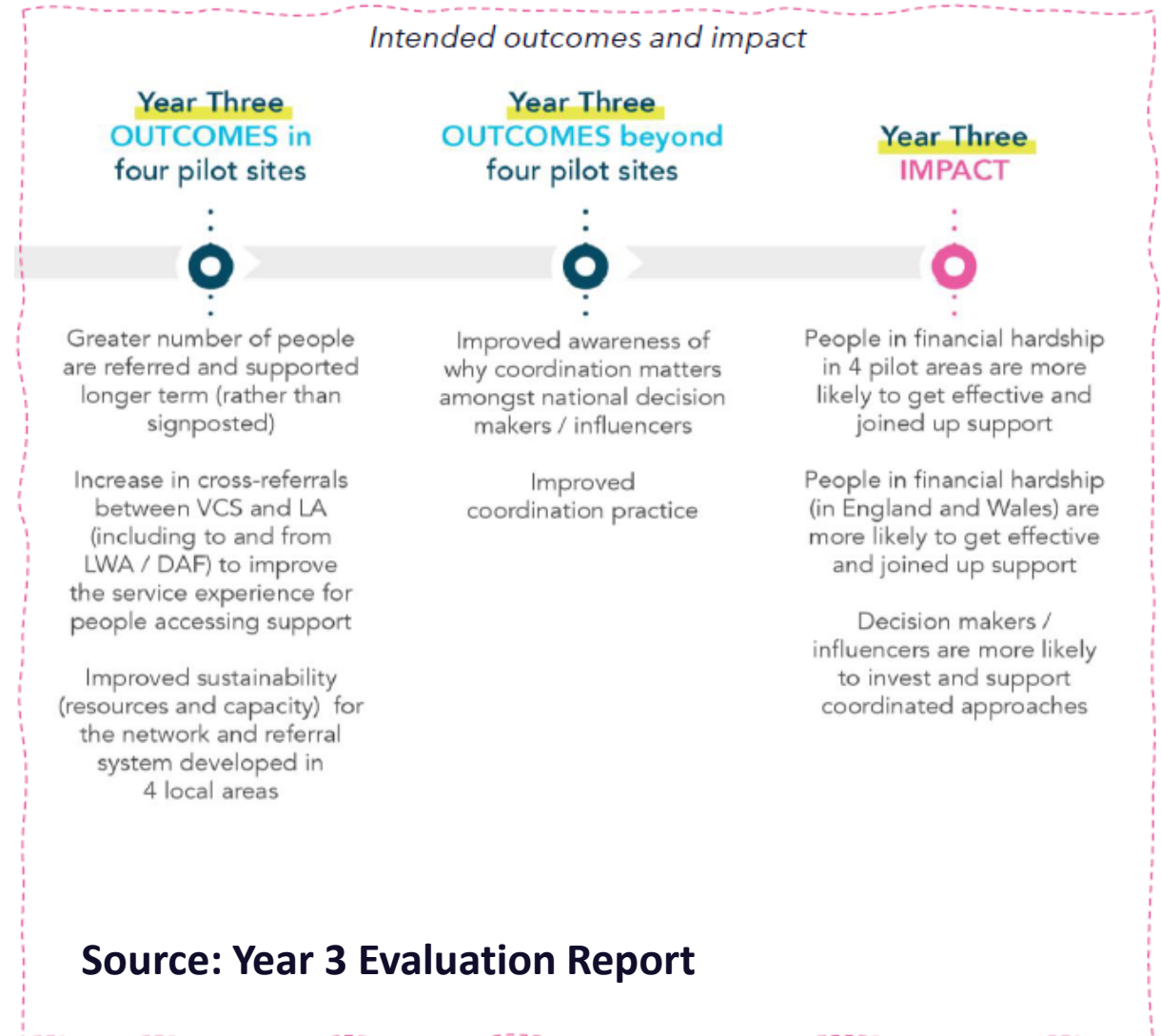
1. Numbers receiving support through LWA scheme increases
2. Numbers receiving support through other crisis support schemes increase
3. Numbers receiving referrals to other support services at point of crisis increases
4. Numbers requiring repeat crisis support decreases
5. Widespread engagement of organisations is secured for a local crisis support network

- Proved challenging due to

- Covid eg target for (1) was +2000 but number was +27000
- Burden on VCS organisations to collect & on TCS to analyse
- Meaningfulness – what does “widespread” mean?

CCS Programme Evaluation: Survey Data

- Theory of Change set out desired outcomes:
 - Improved coordination of crisis support in the four pilot sites
 - Stakeholders beyond the pilot sites aware of programme learning
- 32 Organisations in the four pilot sites were surveyed, plus longer interviews with 18 VCS, 10 LA/NHS, 9 TCS & Programme Board members



Key Referral & Coordination outcomes (Stakeholder Survey) (Year 3 Evaluation Report)



- There are more referrals between VCS and statutory organisations now compared with three years ago (69% agree)
- Agencies are working more closely together because of the CCS Programme (66% agree).
- There are better outcomes for people who use our services because of the CCS Programme (60% agree).
- The coordination of crisis support has been improved in their local area as a result of the CCS Programme (56% agree).
- Accessing services is more likely to be a more dignified experience for people in local areas because of the CCS Programme (56% agree).
- People are now more likely to access support from LWA or DAF compared to 3 years ago (47% agree)

Longer Term Impacts (Stakeholder Survey) (Year 3 Evaluation Report)

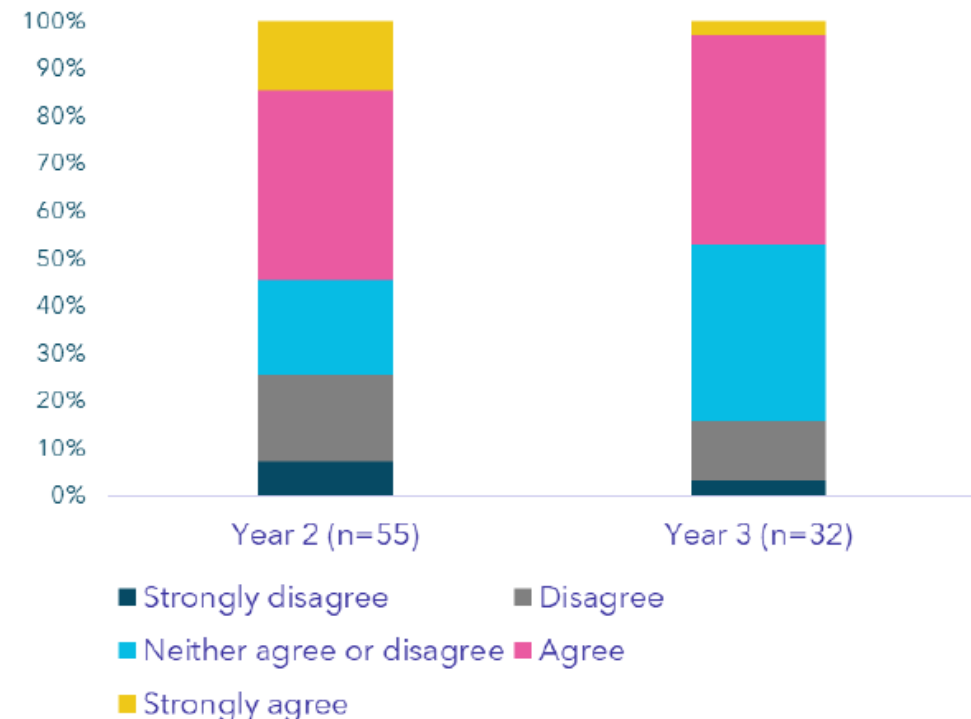


- Sustainability: One pilot site has secured long term funding for their system (NCAN)
- Improved awareness of why coordination matters (Emerging impact)
- Improved coordination practice (Limited impact beyond the 4 sites)
- People in England & Wales likely to get more effective & joined up support (Limited impact)
- Decision makers/ influencers are more likely to invest and support in coordination approaches (Limited impact)

Improving VCS:LA relationships: (Stakeholder Survey)

- The Year 3 evaluation found there had been little change reported in the relationship between LA and VCS between years 2 and 3 of the Programme
- Similar numbers agreed that there was a shared understanding of the challenges people faced when accessing crisis support
- Stakeholders most commonly described 'pockets of joint working' between the LA and VCS in both year 2 and year 3.

Figure 14: Extent to which stakeholders agree that there is shared understanding between LA and VCS (source: Cloud Chamber Survey)



CCS Programme: Key Messages



- (1) Better local coordination has benefits for people who need advice and support
- (2) Better local coordination has benefits for professionals working in organisations offering advice and support
- (3) Better local coordination has benefits for all those working in an area
- (4) The form that coordination takes will vary from place to place, but there are some common elements that can be identified
- (5) Better local coordination does not, of itself, resolve capacity challenges in local services, or people's financial crisis. "Organising the slices better doesn't make the cake grow bigger."

Benefits for people needing advice & support

- Being able to access a range of advice/support from a range of service providers, including “gateway” agencies such as social prescribers, schools and foodbanks – “**no wrong door**”. Social prescribers have been a very important gateway into the local advice and support networks
- Being able to access a more **holistic response** – connecting to advice and support for a range of issues that they may have. System users can make multiple referrals to different organisations using the same information.
- If people need other help, organisations can refer them quickly, securely, and in a dignified way to others in the network, who then have better information on how to help them. This isn’t just signposting, it is a “**warm handover**”.

“The THCAN referral system has been great....We have received a lot more referrals than we would otherwise.” VCS Stakeholder, Tower Hamlets

“I think it promotes healthy partnership work, and it's definitely a better journey for the customer. [For example] I think there's an agreement and polite agreement in terms of how quickly referrals should be turned around” VCS stakeholder, Tower Hamlets

“We have thought more about the journey of people through services. We’ve held vouchers which has reduced the need for referral”. Adviser, Community Law Service

“Many of the people we see live chaotic lives so saying 'take a phone number/address and make an appointment' just won't work” Norwich Foodbank

Benefits for professionals working in organisations offering advice and support

- **Increased efficiency** – the up-to-date directory in the referral system saves professionals' time (whether staff or volunteers) in identifying the right organisation
- **Increased awareness of services** available that can offer different types of advice, help and support. This ranges from statutory services such as Local Authority Welfare Assistance/ Resident Support Schemes, to small, local, or specialist services
- The opportunity to **share the load** between organisations - the ability to turn off new referrals in the system while having confidence that any such referrals will be passed to another organisations – especially important for small VCS organisations.

“Before the digital referral system, I had to keep on chasing [to find out if a referral had been picked up]. It was demanding. Now using the digital referral system saves me 10 to 15 hours a week. I can focus on my caseload now” (Tower Hamlets LA stakeholder)

“Its more collaborative – they [VCS organisations] are all there, and its easier to make contact” VCS Stakeholder, Norfolk

“NCAN gives assurance. If you were just looking on the internet [for somewhere to refer], it's more of a minefield and client themselves has to call them” VCS Stakeholder, Norfolk

Benefits for all those working in an area. It works differently in different places, but there are common elements

- Improving coordination benefits all those working in a local area, as people are more likely to get the advice and support they need more quickly, without “bouncing around the system”.
- Organisations who joined the network worked more together, even before the digital referral system was in place.
- The digital referral system is now being used to provide area-level data to identify trends and support strategic service planning. Norfolk Community Fund used data from the NCAN system to inform its local grant-giving priorities. The LA team in Swansea said that being part of the CCS-led network had highlighted gaps in provision in the area.
- The elements of local coordination are common, but the form this takes differs between local areas. The breakthrough for Swansea came when the footprint of the referral system expanded to include Neath Port Talbot, to match the Wales Government Regional Advice Network.

“We get learning from organisations about our communities through engagement in NCAN. It helps us to respond better to community needs”.
Staff member,
Norfolk Community Fund

Costs of the network and the referral system

- **Important: The digital referral system supports the network of local organisations in working together. The priority for funding is for staff to convene the network, build relationships, act as a link to statutory organisations, and grow and develop the local network. Don't just buy a tech solution – it doesn't run itself!**
- Staff time is required on an ongoing basis to train new organisations in using the Digital Referral System, and to train new people as staff or volunteers move on.
- **The Norfolk system, with nearly 140 organisations on the system, costs £2.5k per annum for system support and £40k per annum for two part-time members of staff.** The Director leads the network, convenes the Steering Group and partnership meetings and represents the network externally. The Coordinator trains new users on the system, responds to users' queries, ensures the Directory is up to date etc. NCAN have developed a charging model whereby statutory organisations pay a fee to be a part of the system, and VCSE organisations can join without charge. Until this year, individual LA departments have paid the joining fee, but there is now an LA-wide agreement.
- **The Tower Hamlets system, with 30 organisations, costs £2.5k per annum for system support, and a £20k contribution to the staff time of those who run the pre-existing Advice Network,** which is now underpinned by the digital referral mechanism. The development costs of the THCAN, OCAN, and SNPTRAN systems have been met by the CCS Programme. They are now seeking sustainability funding from various sources, including the LA where they are on the system, and other grant funding.

Challenges for local VCSE organisations: Capacity

- **Short-term costs:** Getting involved in a local network meetings has costs in the short-term, and the benefits come in the long-term. *“The challenge is working in partnership when my day to day focus is keeping my organisation afloat”* VCS Stakeholder, Summer 2021.
- **Small organisations:** In Oldham, 70% of the VCS organisations have a turnover of less than £10,000.
- Over time, the networks have developed a core group, comprising larger organisations with more strategic capacity, who drive development plus a much larger network of smaller organisations who engage less frequently.
- **A system under strain:** Organising the slices better doesn't make the cake bigger, or magic new slices of cake into existence. *“There's no point in having a referral system if you don't fund the services to refer to”.* VCS Organisation, Norfolk

Challenges for local VCSE organisations

- **Time for training:** It takes time to get trained on the digital referral system and learn a new way of doing things. Training may need to be in bite-sized chunks to make it easier to attend or take in.

“I found [the training] was quite fast for me [...] I couldn't remember anything from the training. Therefore, I just thought it's best I just leave it alone” VCS organisation, Tower Hamlets

- **Digital Skills:** The digital referral system requires some digital access and literacy. Staff and volunteers who aren't confident working online may need more time and support to get up to speed.
- **Interaction with case management systems:** The NCAN system now used in the four pilot sites is not a case management system. Some organisations consider this a downside as it requires entries in two systems. Some organisations consider this an upside as it is less burdensome in terms of recording information/ GDPR requirements etc.

Programme Learning – Elements of effective coordination



1. A network of people who
 - share a **desire to achieve better outcomes** collaboratively
 - have a **shared understanding** of the local environment in which agencies are operating
 - are **motivated** to act together – “willing to leave your ego at the door”.
2. An underpinning ‘**mechanism**’ that facilitates robust referrals across agencies. More than just the odd email....
3. **Capacity & legitimacy** to lead the network, administer the referral mechanism and support collaboration (including bridging between VCS and LA)
4. **Sustained investment and leadership** – it does not happen on its own

“The referral system is only a tool. It builds on relationships and organisations willing to work together”
VCS Stakeholder,
Oldham

A motivated network

- A network of people who
 - share a **desire to achieve better outcomes** collaboratively
 - have a **shared understanding** of the local environment in which agencies are operating
 - are **motivated** to act together – “willing to leave your ego at the door”.
- **Shared goals** for the community, and a **shared value-base**, are the starting points for collaborative working. “We’re not in competition for supporting people”.
- Effective coordination is built on **relationships of trust** between individuals within organisations, and building and developing such a network takes time (years, rather than months). “We have shared goals and we trust each other – that’s the drive to get out there and support people”.
- Motivation to collaborate has to be both **personal and organisational**. If it is only one person it will be lost when they move on. People have to be prepared to change – to become more open to new ways of working, and to move from a “signposting mindset” to a “referral mindset.”

An underpinning mechanism that facilitates referrals

- An underpinning ‘mechanism’ that facilitates robust referrals across agencies. More than just the odd email....
- The digital referral mechanism **increases confidence** in collaboration. A referral system allows people to say “no” with confidence it will be picked up by someone else.
- The digital referral mechanism **increases reach** across the network. It enables referrals from smaller, disadvantaged communities & encourages people to think about organisations they wouldn’t otherwise refer to (including the LWAS). It enables specialist sub-groups (eg on debt).
- Mechanism **increases efficiency and impact**. “It is a warm handover – we don’t lose a client”. It produces data about referral patterns that allow organisations to spot key issues emerging.

Capacity & legitimacy to lead

- **Capacity & legitimacy to lead the network, administer the referral mechanism and support collaboration (including bridging VCS & LA)**
- **Coordination has a cost** – to build and keep up network relationships, grow the organisations on the network (especially smaller groups) and maintain the technical aspects (IT, licences).
- There are **various types of capacity required** – admin/event organisation; facilitation skills; relationship building; policy engagement.
- There are some examples of the LA leading coordination, but most participants feel the **coordination leadership role is better situated in the VCS**. It reduces the power imbalance and builds respect for VCS leadership.
- There is a **lack of capacity in Local Authorities**, as well as in the VCS.
- Coordination of local services **does not create capacity** in those services to see more clients, nor does it bring new organisations into being if they do not exist. **Organising the slices better doesn't make the cake bigger – or magic up new slices of cake.**

Reflections on VCS leadership & the challenge of capacity and legitimacy

1. The programme funded VCS organisations to take the lead in convening a local network. In one or two of the pilot sites this led to some tensions with the LA, which was required to work in a new way with its local VCS sector. Reflecting on this at the end of the programme, both LA reps and VCS colleagues described this as a key benefit of the programme – it reduced the normal power imbalance and gave both small and large VCS organisations a stronger place at the table.
2. Which VCS organisation convened the network also led to some tension.
 1. In Norfolk NCAN had been set up in 2005 to act on behalf of the local VCS. In Tower Hamlets there was an existing network convened by Island Advice (an independent advice agency) and it made sense to build on that.
 2. In Oldham Ancora, the organisation that stepped forward, found it hard to identify the capacity to lead the network and the system – the part-time project manager also undertook frontline work and this always took precedence. The retirement of a long-established CEO meant the organisation no longer had the local legitimacy to bring others on board. Leadership of the network and the system has now switched to an existing umbrella organisation (Action Together).
 3. In Swansea it was not clear who would take the lead in the system, and a formal tender process was held, which was won by Swansea Law Clinic, who are part of the Regional Advice Network. This has helped with establishing local legitimacy.

Reflections on the role of Advice Agencies & Advice Networks in leading coordination



- In Norfolk and Tower Hamlets the CCS Programme built on the existing Community Advice Network
- In Swansea the University Law Clinic has taken the lead – connecting with the leadership of the Wales Government-led Regional Advice Network.
- Some theories:
 - More likely to part of a network already
 - More likely to have an overview of the range of needs for advice and support, and be accustomed to triage what they can help with and signpost/ refer to other agencies
 - More likely to have clear “client-facing” hours, together with “critical paperwork” hours
 - More likely to have paid staff comfortable with digital record-keeping

CCS Programme Conclusions

- All four of the programme sites have made progress in
 - developing a network of VCS organisations which are working more closely together, and with their Local Authority.
 - expanding or adopting a digital referral mechanism which is facilitating more efficient inter-organisational referrals and increasing reach.
- The challenge is now one of sustainability of these networks and systems – coordination is not a free good.
- The programme’s support for VCS organisations was felt to have raised their status in the local area, and given them “a place at the table”.
- The programme sites note the limitations to coordination – **“there’s no point having a referral system if there’s no funding for the services we refer to”**.

Appendices:

Contacts for More Information

Case Studies: The NCAN & THCAN networks and systems

Funders and Partners

More information & useful contacts

CCS Programme website – background to the programme and evaluation reports :

<https://www.coordinatedcommunitysupport.org.uk/>

CCS Programme contacts:

thomas.cave@childrenssociety.org.uk (Thomas Cave, Policy and Impact Manager (Child Poverty), The Children's Society)

j.grauberg@gmail.com (Janet Grauberg, Learning coordinator)

Digital Referral System information:

<https://www.hutfortytwo.co.uk/work/referral-system/>

Example: The NCAN Digital Referral System



- **“Provides ‘one door’ into the diverse VCSE landscape by pooling a wide range of VCSE and other support providers into one platform, enabling referral pathways that are secure, efficient and with trackable outcomes.”**
- The Norfolk Community Advice Network (NCAN) uses a bespoke digital referral system developed by a company called Hut Forty Two. In 2021 over 6,000 referrals were made, and its more than 7,000 already in 2022.
- Over 70 services accepting referrals for various issues – financial, debt, welfare advice but also mental health, wills and POA, domestic abuse etc.
- Comprises a Directory with a detailed description for each service available, along with their criteria for accepting referrals, enabling the referrer to select the correct agency for the client.
- The referrer selects the best organisation from the Directory based on their client’s issues and circumstances. They put a referral through the referral system. The receiving organisation has 8 working days to contact the client.

Example: The NCAN Digital Referral System



Benefits for the client

- Receiving organisation contacts the client;
- They are referred to the most appropriate agency securely and quickly;
- Clients don't have to repeat their story.

“For vulnerable clients who struggle to engage with a service, the referral details enable us to encourage the client to engage in a way that signposting can never do”

Debt advisor at Norfolk Community Law Service

Benefits for the agency

- Access multiple organisations from across Norfolk;
- Send client documents, contact details, and confidential information securely;
- Track progress of outgoing referrals;
- Data can be analysed to help measure agency's impact;
- Promote shared processes & partnership working;
- Prevent duplication of triage work.


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Steps in building a Digital Referral System


Engagement: A core group of organisations, who probably know each other already, get together to design and test the system. Likely to include the larger advice agencies and the LA.



Expansion: Additional members are onboarded onto the system. Likely to include other advice agencies & those supporting people in financial crisis.



Extension: Beyond advice agencies to a much wider range of VCSE and statutory agencies offering a diverse range of advice and support – such as social prescribers, schools, foodbanks and community organisations



Establishment: Embedding into the local “ways of working” and securing sustained, long-term funding.

Example: NCAN Local Network Benefits for VCSE organisations



Promotion of your Organisation



Organisation updates and NEW services included in the NCAN Newsletter.



Updates posted on referral system board sends automatic email to all members.



Receiving organisations' details in the directory

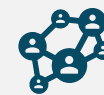


All of this contributes to accurate and efficient referrals, getting people to the right help as soon as possible.

Networking & Collaboration



Network events for NCAN leads in local organisations



Organisation leaders' updates with insight into data, demands, trends.



Increased knowledge and awareness of what support for people is available.

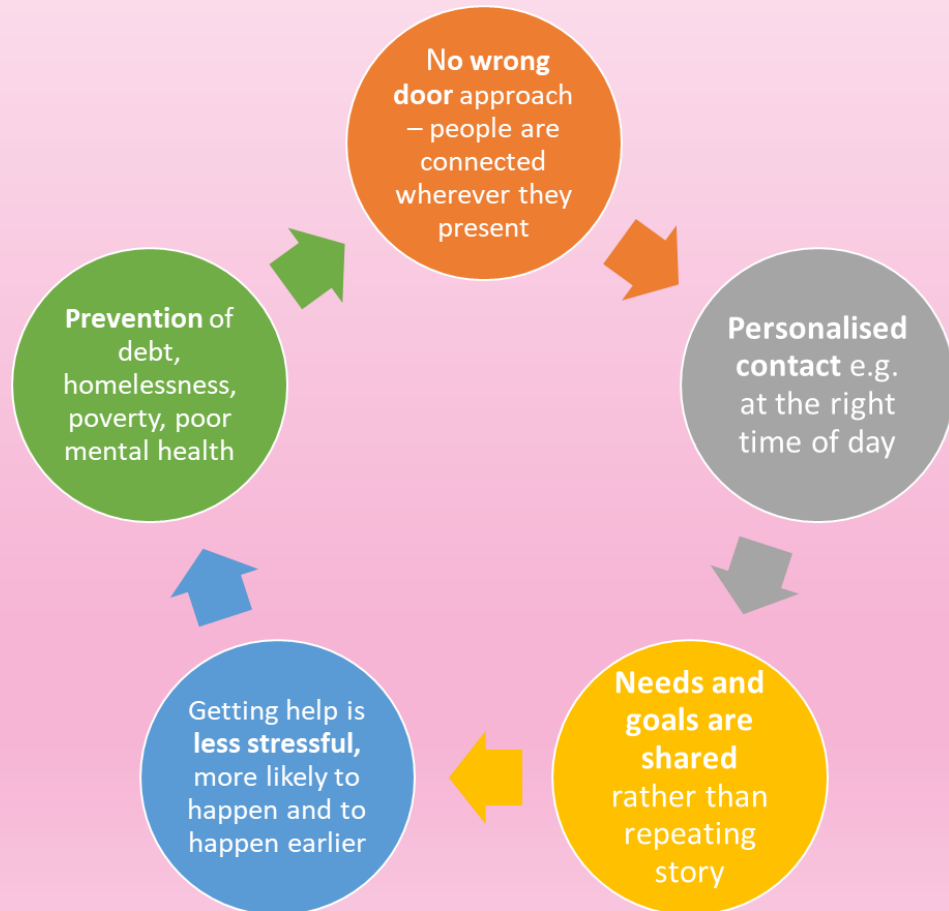


Access to bitesize e-learning to upskill and raise awareness.

Example: NCAN Referral System: Benefits for VCSE organisations



Person-centred Warm Handover



Evidence & Data



Evidence of demand on your services and where it's coming from.



Evidence of collaboration between you and other organisations.



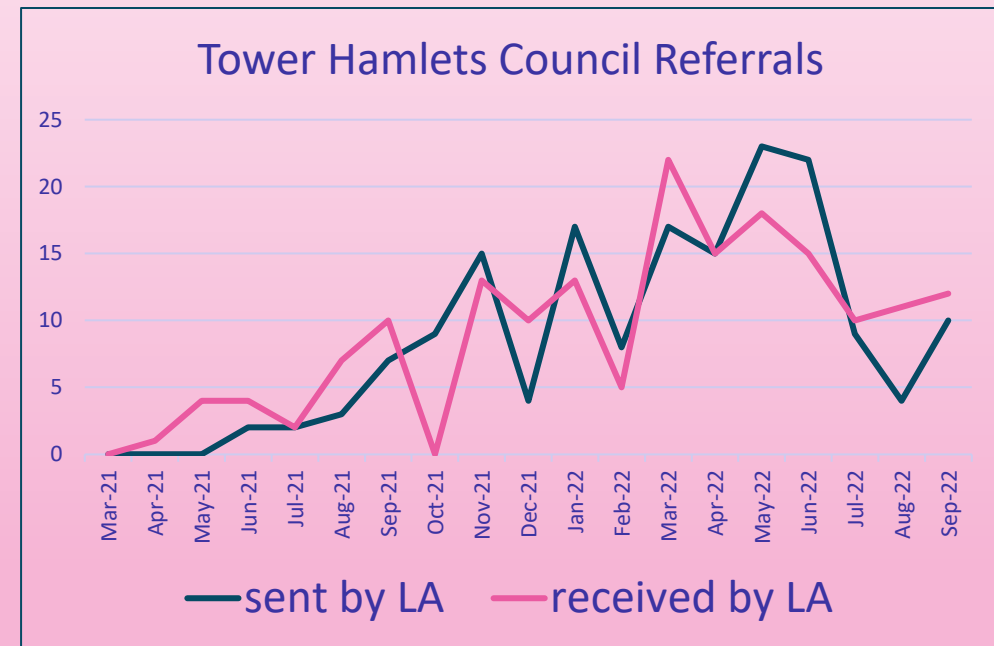
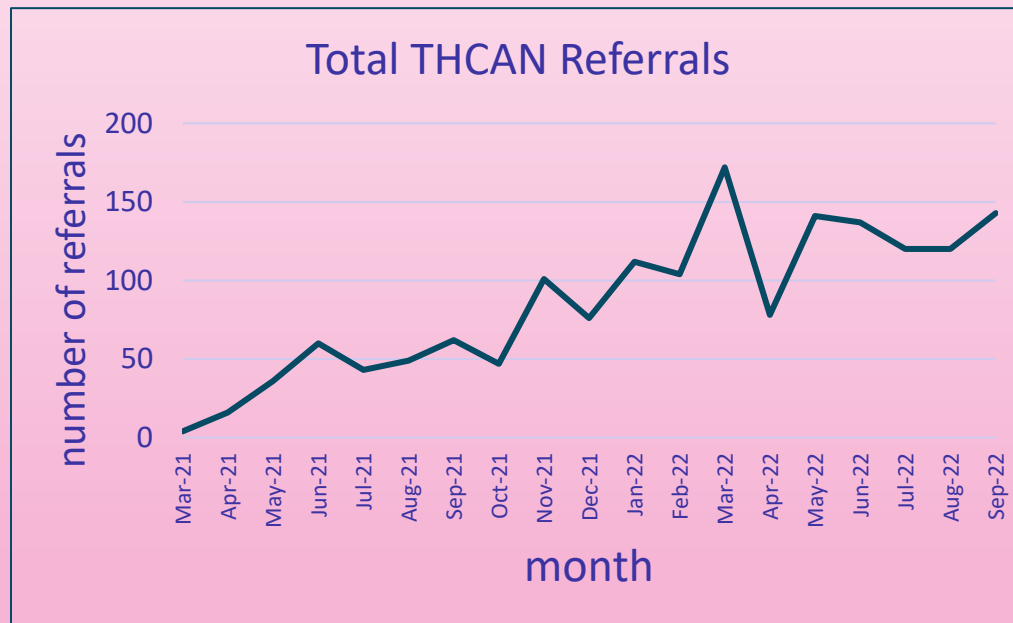
Data and insights to use for funding applications.



Addressing underlying causes of issues and averting costly services.

Case study: Tower Hamlets adoption

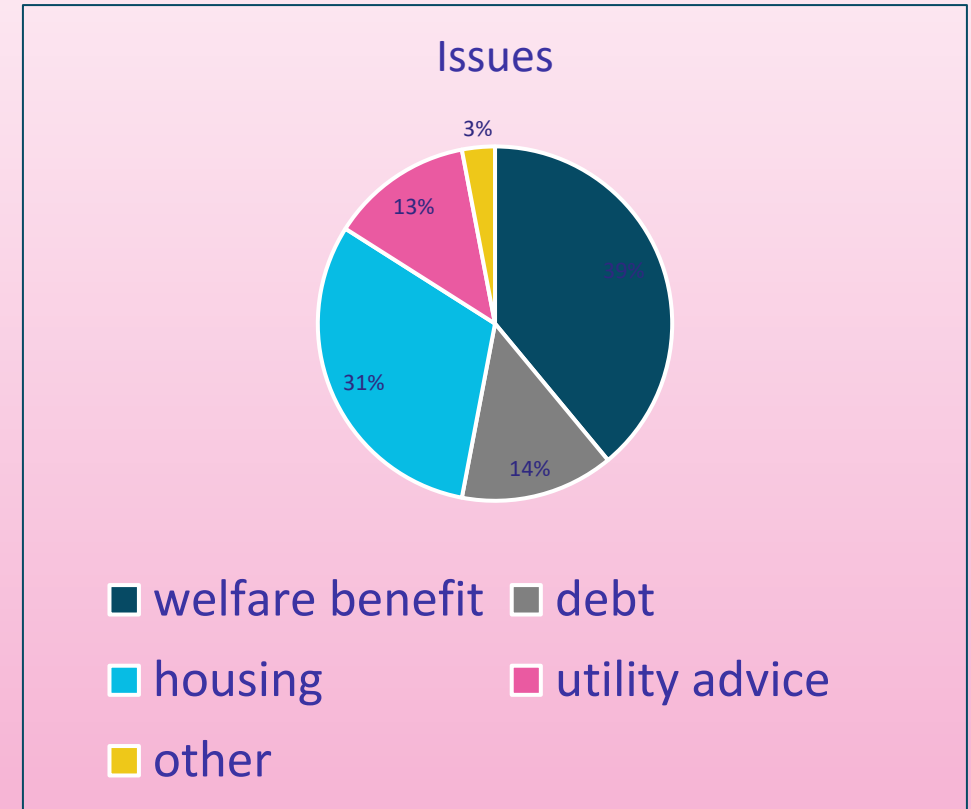
Tower Hamlets – a pre-existing established network of advice organisations, now supported by a digital referral mechanism & growing the reach within both the statutory and voluntary sectors.



Between March 2021 and September 2022 referrals from/to the LA accounted for 20% of referrals in the system.

Case study: Tower Hamlets adoption

- 800 referrals made in the first year (March 2021 - March 2022). A further 800 referrals have been made in the following six months (to end September 2022).
- 20% are Local Authority referrals (to and from)
- 40 different organisations including social prescribers, schools, community centres, housing organisations, food provision, with 295 users registered.
- 19 different issues: Welfare Benefit, Community Care, Consumer, Debt, Housing, Employment, Immigration, Small Claims, Carers Assessment, Family, Utility Advice, Advocacy, Financial Capability, Digital Inclusion, Wellbeing Activities, Volunteering & Employment Activities, Courses & Training, Job Search, Food Support.



Funders & Partners

