These issues are not new

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The social and community enterprise community's response to the impact of the Covid pandemic this year has, rightly, been gaining growing recognition. This response has seen countless locally-based organisations working collaboratively - both to extend and/or adapt their services to meet the immediate needs of families and individuals within their local communities. A consequence of this has also seen some of the issues that affect our communities being brought into sharper light – such as food poverty; social isolation; the digital divide – and the critical role and contribution of local, community-led organisations in seeking to combat these issues.

The attention now being given to these issues is important, welcome – but overdue. The recognition of this 'critical role and contribution of local, community-led organisations' is also important and welcome – but, again, overdue.

These issues are not new in our more disadvantaged communities – and they have not just arisen as a result of Covid.   Although we now talk about how Covid has exacerbated existing inequalities, we mustn't allow this to excuse the previous prevalence of unacceptable levels of inequality.

These inequalities and associated issues have sadly been commonplace in our communities for a long time – and we should not forget the fact that so many of our social and community enterprise organisations were set up to try and alleviate and/or provide solutions to these very problems – taking the view that it was local communities themselves that were best placed to provide the most appropriate level of support for their own people.

It has not gone unnoticed among many – and galling for some - that it has required a crisis such as the one we are all experiencing at present in order for others to now fully appreciate the importance of these issues – and to recognise the value of the work being carried out at a local level. Frontline organisations – across our third sector - have been carrying out such work, in difficult circumstance, for decades – and, all too often, under the radar.

With an understanding of the complexity of the issues, it is crucial that the knowledge, experience and views of frontline organisations are properly taken on board - especially as we try to address the impact of Covid on community mental health and other areas that aren't as tangible as food and digital devices.

As we all look towards our recovery, these issues must remain at the forefront of our minds and that, working together across society, we can begin to address these issues through the provision of appropriate levels of resources and support, particularly at a local level.