

**What areas of community support for vulnerable residents do you consider fell within the remit of Community First during the pandemic?**

As the CVS (Council of Voluntary Service) for Havant, Community First played an integral role alongside HBC and HCC in responding to COVID19

Working through the Local Resilience Forum, Community First took a lead role behalf of the CVS network and voluntary sector to support the Hampshire Hub (Hantshelp4vulnerable) and worked with District/Borough Council leads to establish the network of Local Response Centres including that hosted by HBC/EHDC. Community First worked with HBC to ensure that people who needed help were connected to those offering support, helped co-ordinate the voluntary sector response and importantly supported groups to do so safely and to ensure they had the capacity and resources they needed. Our role included;

- 1) **Linking vulnerable people with local groups and volunteers** to get help with shopping, prescription medication and to reduce isolation and loneliness. This was our initial role in the immediate aftermath of the lockdown announcement and the introduction of shielding for the most vulnerable. Some of this was in advance of HCC Hub and HBC Local Response Centre being set up and going fully live on 1/4/2020.
- 2) **Recruiting and mobilising volunteers.** This included placing volunteers into established voluntary sector groups where additional capacity was requested and required. It also included setting up small teams of locally based volunteers who could respond quickly to urgent requests for help and support including out of hours requests.
- 3) **Supporting voluntary sector groups.** Our role has been to ensure that the voluntary sector has the resources it needs to deliver effective support. This includes advice and support on safeguarding, DBS checking, risk assessment, money handling and mechanisms for payment for shopping, fundraising and coordination with other activity. Some groups were well organised and resourced with good systems and processes in place from the 'get go'; others required additional support and it was vital to keep groups updated on rapidly changing Govt guidelines.

Community First entered into an MOU with HBC/EHDC to provide support through the LRC (Local Response Centre). The MOU refers to the roles of LRC partners which from a Community First perspective included:

- Receiving referrals from the LRC and directly from HCC Social Work team for requests for support and to help broker those requiring voluntary based support with registered volunteers and local agencies
- Monitoring successful brokerages of support and any issues regarding the nature of referrals.
- Providing regular feedback to the HCC/LRF via the HCC relationship managers on capacity issues and resource requirements through weekly meetings
- Providing a primary alternative back up arrangement for referrals between HCC and local co-ordination where capacity issues may prevent the smooth brokerage of support directly via the local authority
- Reiterating and disseminating key messages on receiving help safely and the need to maintain shielding and isolation in line with national guidelines.

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As an infrastructure organisation it is our role to support VCSE and capacity building within the community. Given that so much of the response was carried out by VCSE & pop up mutual aid groups our role was to ensure those groups had all the support they required to deliver effective, coordinated support whilst keeping themselves and residents safe. Specifically, this included:

1. Providing central telephone and email support for residents needing help
  - a) Referred residents to appropriate local group or agency. This was provided 9am-5pm, seven days per week from 1/4/20. This reduced to five days per week when HantsHelp4Vulnerable reduced their call centre hours to five days per week after shielding ended at end of July).
  - b) Prior to the HantsHelp4Vulnerable phone line going live, this was the only centralised contact centre for Havant Borough.
  - c) It was publicised by HBC, so the volume of calls was high.
  - d) It saved HBC from creating their own email and support service in the early days of the pandemic.
  - e) It has continued throughout the pandemic, even once HantsHelp4Vulnerable was set up, for residents to contact us directly and to reduce demand on the central service or repeat requests.
2. Providing support to HBC Response centre once it and HantsHelp4CVulnerable were set up
  - a) Referrals for complex cases and advice on which groups to refer to
  - b) Direct volunteer referrals for urgent cases – set up on the request of HBC when local groups were not able to respond quickly enough. This included ‘Community First Delivers’ a team of dedicated emergency response volunteers including motorbike prescription deliveries as well as shopping and urgent food deliveries.
3. Working closely with Tracey Wood, Nicki Conyard and wider HBC Communities team and LRC Team to ensure that all of Havant Borough was covered by voluntary groups and had sufficient volunteers to support residents
  - a) Identifying and contacting community leaders, community groups, foodbanks and churches etc and asking if they would support local residents.
  - b) Creating and maintaining a list of all community groups that were able to support residents, with contact details and services offered. This was used by Community First for its helpdesk and also by HBC.
  - c) Regularly contacting all groups to check on their capacity and to see if they needed further support or more volunteers.
  - d) Surveys to understand more about capacity and longevity of local groups and the needs in their areas
4. Supporting new and existing groups as they responded to the crisis and the needs of residents
  - a) Helping new and existing groups:
    - i) Signposting to external resources, e.g. Covid mutual aid
    - ii) Telephone support and advice as they set up their groups and subsequent phone and email contact

- iii) Advice to individual groups on safeguarding issues, money handling, difficult cases, boundaries and referrals to other agencies <https://www.cfirst.org.uk/havantconnects/>
- iv) Referring volunteers to them
- b) Provided/circulated resources, policies and guidelines including:  
<https://www.cfirst.org.uk/coronavirus/organisations-who-need-help/>
  - i) Volunteer guidance
  - ii) Volunteer handbook
  - iii) Risk assessment
  - iv) Safeguarding
  - v) Money handling
  - vi) Mental health
  - vii) Encouraging independence for users during re-opening
  - viii) Contact details for onward referrals
- c) Set up 'Havant Connects' web page as a central resource for Havant groups  
<https://www.cfirst.org.uk/havantconnects/>
- d) Set up the Havant Community Coordination Group (HCCOG)
  - i) Chaired and managed regular meetings
  - ii) Set up online/email group to encourage communications

## 5. Volunteering

HBC took the decision in February to reduce the grant to Community First by £6,950 in 2020/21 in addition to the year on year 10% reductions that had been implemented in recent years. This funding previously enabled us to provide a volunteer brokerage service in Havant – helping to recruit, train, support and mobilise volunteers for our member organisations. As this decision was taken before the COVID outbreak, Community First took the strategic decision to continue to offer volunteer support during the pandemic, seeing this as a vital component of the Community Response. We continued to advertise and recruited and registered 395 volunteers

We referred 139 to local groups and registered the remainder as CF volunteers.

Groups where volunteers were referred and placed included;

Horndean Voluntary Care Group

Leigh Park Food Bank

Community Kindness

Bedhampton Churches

Age Concern Hampshire

MHA Live at Home scheme

Stakes Stars

St Francis & St Clares

Emsworth Good Neighbours

Purbrook & Widley Residents Association

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In addition, we have also

- a) Maintained a database of available volunteers in Havant
  - b) Contacted volunteers, giving them safeguarding guidance, finding out what they are able to do
  - c) Referred volunteers to local groups who requested volunteers
  - d) Managing a team of Community First volunteers who were directly tasked with shopping, prescriptions etc
  - e) Working with Solent Advanced Bikers Club to set up a prescription collection service to cover areas not already covered by community groups.
  - f) Set up a streamlined online DBS service to allow fast processing of DBS checks for volunteers and groups
  - g) Offer mental health first aid, Health and Safety, Risk Assessment and other training via online courses for individuals and organisations - especially to help with mental health issues
  - h) Provided community transport for Waterlooville Foodbank deliveries
6. Helping VCSE groups and individuals through recovery and reopening
- a) Co-leadership of Community Buildings Forum
  - b) One-to-one coaching of leaders
  - c) Advice and support on re-opening services, VCSE offices and premises
  - d) Advice on funding (see note 7 below)
  - e) Provided a suite of online training courses (free to users) to help individuals and groups to recover from lockdown
7. Support with funding and resource provision
- a) Created and maintained a comprehensive up to date list of Covid-specific funding opportunities
  - b) Helped groups to write funding applications
  - c) Applied for, and received funding from Hants & IOW Community Foundation/NET and from National Lottery Community Fund to support the residents of Havant, including food, a wellbeing worker to support complex cases and to provide additional support and capacity in community transport.

### **Was this an increase in responsibility and if so, to what extent did it increase?**

Yes, the COVID response required us to increase our overall responsibility and leadership of the VCSE sector. Main increases in terms of our own capacity were:

1. Staffing the helpdesk (phone and email) from 9am to 5pm, seven days a week (later reduced to five days per week).

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2. Creating a bespoke cloud based wellbeing CRM (Customer Relationship Management) system to safely manage personal information on residents supported and to provide a record of all residents directly helped and referred by Community First.
3. Introducing a 'soft phone' system so staff could work on the helpdesk and CRM remotely from home
4. Managing our own (new) team of volunteers for shopping and prescriptions
5. Supporting new groups and creating new policies, procedures, advice etc
6. Setting up and maintaining lists of Covid groups, referral contacts, Covid-related funding.
7. Creating new communication mechanisms, including Havant Community Co-Ordinating Group (HCCOG) meetings and online group, new dedicated web page for Havant.
8. Managing a vastly increased number of new volunteers and matching them to opportunities
9. Developing an entirely new suite of online training programmes

### **What is the challenge for encouraging community engagement and providing community support?**

The workload in supporting so many new groups with so many new requirements while also running the helpdesk were challenging for our capacity. We received no additional funding to increase capacity or provide dedicated COVID response. We were of course able to divert and utilise some of the grant funds from HBC to provide COVID support alongside some of our core grant from HCC. Additional funds we secured were all for frontline, emergency response rather than covering cost of investment required in ICT and new systems

Community engagement and providing community support is our 'day job'; it's what we do. We have the knowledge and expertise and were ready and able to respond to the challenge. The main challenge was in coordinating a fast and effective response. We accept that many new groups established quickly and effectively with little or no external support. This demonstrated resilience and willingness of many Havant residents to help their neighbours and people in their communities. Ensuring the groups adopted safe working practices to protect themselves and the people they were trying to help was essential. Ensuring appropriate checks and balances were in place to protect vulnerable residents and ensuring volunteers had clear referral mechanisms and appropriate support in place to raise issues or concerns. Several of the more vulnerable residents had mental health and emotional support needs and whilst volunteers weren't expected to deal with these inevitably when delivering food or prescriptions some were exposed to issues and needs beyond their capabilities.

Many of the mutual aid groups were supported and led by amazing community volunteers playing an essential role in coordinating local activity. This role (alongside role of other volunteers) was tiring and time consuming. The Coordination Group was established to provide peer support and help and to offer advice and reassurance to group co-ordinators and to share challenging issues or fluctuating demands.

Maintaining the commitment of volunteers over a sustained period is a key challenge. At times we had more volunteers than we had people who needed help and keeping volunteer motivated and wanted was also challenging. There were multiple offers around transport and food distribution which combined with redeployed staff from across enforcement and other teams in HBC meant that at times volunteers were left waiting to be asked to help having offered. We endeavoured to mobilise as many volunteers as quickly and as safely as possible but where we couldn't we communicated with volunteers to explain delays and asking them to be patient. As the lockdown continued over several weeks and months there was a need for a sustained volunteer effort so more volunteers were and

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continue to be required. We also need to recognise that the role of volunteers changes during the course of a pandemic with increasing demand for 'check and chat' calls and keeping in touch with those who are on their own to reduce isolation and to help those with more complex needs. This 'ask' is more challenging than mobilising the significant numbers at the outset for food shopping and prescription deliveries. We also need to sustain numbers of volunteers as more return to work and other commitments and we've seen a steady decline in volunteer availability since July.

Going forward the challenge is to maintain a level of readiness should a further lock down or local support be needed. The problem is giving certainty to volunteers about how many and when they might be needed.

### **What is the quantifiable and qualitative impact (positive, negative) on Community First?**

#### 1. Positive impacts:

- a) Havant CCOG has improved our responsiveness and ability to communicate with community groups
- b) Many more volunteers have registered with us, who we hope to be able to encourage into future volunteering
- c) Raised our profile in the sector and among the public
- d) Further developed our close and positive working relationships with Havant Borough Council Community team
- e) We are proud of what we have achieved for Havant
- f) Secured external funding to support more vulnerable residents over next 6-8 months

#### 2. Negative impacts:

- a) Some staff have found the changes and increased workload stressful
- b) Many of our services have had to close down or be drastically reduced, including Leigh Park Community Centre, Park Play, Positive Pathways, Community Transport and our face to face training and community group meetings and events have
- c) We have lost income due to the reduction in/loss of services and recovery is likely to be slow and this will impact our year-end financial position

### **To what extent have you worked with the Council during the pandemic?**

We have worked very closely with the Communities team and the Covid Local Response Centre throughout the whole pandemic/lockdown period. Holding regular meetings to ensure our work was complimentary and did not duplicate. The Havant CCG was set up in partnership with HBC Communities Team, and the use of LPCC was made immediately available for the Food Hub.

We met weekly with HCC & HBC to coordinate the Helpline response, ensure a consistency of support available to local residents in need. Our CEO was also embedded in the LRF working with the welfare and supporting vulnerable people cells and through the Partnership Delivery Group through which district, county and voluntary sector response was co-ordinated

**To what extent have you worked with community/voluntary groups?**

Much of this is outlined in our statement above but we immediately began mapping the voluntary sector response in Havant, contacting the existing VCSE organisations responding and the new spontaneously created Mutual Aid groups. Offers of support were made to all groups, the most requested help was for Volunteers & Guidance on Safeguarding practices to keep volunteers and residents safe.

The Havant COG meeting and email group was set up to ensure all groups had the opportunity to liaise with us and receive support in a timely manner. Our Helpline and Support@cfirst.org.uk email were set up to support residents and community groups, so support was available 7 days a week from 25/3/20

**To what extent have you worked with Havant Borough Council Councillors?**

1. We have supported HB Councillors in their roles as community/volunteer group leaders. A number of HB Cllrs responded to the pandemic very quickly, as did we, coordinating a volunteer response in their areas. They have been fully supported in their roles, and offered exactly the same support available to other spontaneously created mutual aid groups. This support includes providing additional volunteers or taking over some or all aspects of co-ordination or providing additional advice and support or links to other VCSE organisations for residents with more complex needs. This may be around food, dog walking, referrals to mental health support or advice services.
2. Cllr Tim Pike was a key member of HCCOG ensuring oversight of key issues raised by mutual aid and other voluntary groups.
3. Tim Houghton our CEO was invited by the Leader to meet with full council via an online meeting with HBC CEO and senior officers to answer questions and discuss improvements that could be made to local liaison in May

**Have you encountered any problems working with any community groups in the Havant borough? If so, please list.**

Not many on the whole communication with groups has been positive and it has been great to see the fantastic community response. We are aware that in the early few weeks of the pandemic many new groups including some established and run by local Cllrs started without the need for any additional support. This upsurge in mutual aid was seen across the country and all others communities experienced same. It was and will remain an essential part of any community led crisis response. The role of Community first especially during those first 2-3 weeks was not necessarily well understood particularly by those less familiar with our work or not in regular contact with us. In hindsight we should have done more to communicate our role and the support we could offer in order to manage expectations.

Community First had systems in place and were fully operational on a COVID response footing w/c 25<sup>th</sup> March we were working within the parameters of the LRF and working alongside HCC and HBC to ensure an effective VCSE offer could be maintained longer term. The opportunity to speak directly with Cllrs in May and the setting up of the Havant Community Coordinating Group helped to address these teething issues and we were grateful for the support of senior officers and Cllrs to retain a focus on the shared task at hand which was helping the most vulnerable residents in our community.

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Collecting and maintaining information has been difficult with a minority of groups, knowing how many volunteers/clients they have helps CF & HBC plan effectively for the future including appropriate contingency plans. Some groups have not been happy or willing to share the information, and one or two have given inflated or estimated responses which are difficult to quantify.

There was a small problem at the start of Covid with a couple of the Cllr run groups who appeared to not understand the role of Community First.

### **How prepared is Community First to move into a second wave or similar crisis affecting vulnerable residents?**

We are well prepared internally and in relation to wider VCSE sector in Havant. Of course, we cannot maintain a constant state of readiness without returning to some aspects of BAU and charities and voluntary groups face significant challenges in terms of restarting services and support to vulnerable people whilst being mindful of the need to have contingency plan should local lockdowns or restrictions need to be applied.

1. We have a smoothly-running helpdesk with experienced staff and we have the IT infrastructure in place to maintain and remobilise volunteers and voluntary groups should this be required.
2. We have maintained contact with our registered volunteers and with volunteer Group coordinators.
3. Where some groups have now stood down we are maintaining the coordination of local volunteers and are confident that whilst some volunteers are returning to work and stepping back now that demand for their support has reduced we have a willingness for people to return to assist with food distribution and prescription deliveries if required. As time goes on we need to continue to monitor this capacity.
4. We have also successfully secured lottery funding and recruited a Well-being Worker to support Havant residents with more complex problems. This provides additional capacity in our system to deal with those more time consuming and often more complex cases that require more support and ongoing intervention above that offered by volunteers
5. We have maintained our role within the LRF Welfare Recovery Group advising on role of VCSE and ensuring appropriate messages and support from HCC, public health and Govt are clear and understood.
6. The biggest challenge will be to provide community support in the areas where there are no longer active local voluntary groups, predominantly to the west of the A3
7. We are co-ordinating Havant's Local Food Partnership and continuing to work with LRC to review contingency plans for food supply and distribution

### **What is the plan and what is different within that plan from what was done in this regard, during the recent period of lockdown due to COVID19?**

Our plan includes;

1. Having good insight and preparedness to stand up volunteers and volunteer groups. We have maintained contact and are confident in being able to mobilise and target volunteer resources in line with local lockdown plans. The Advance Motorcyclists are available to be recalled should we need to increase capacity at short notice.
2. We will mobilise a team of emergency volunteers and where necessary run a more expansive volunteer group to replace the missing ones. We are building in contingency staff resource for this (e.g. extending the role of the well-being worker beyond six months) to make this sustainable



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3. Maintain our role in LRC until 31/3/21
4. Repurpose Leigh Park Community centre as food distribution hub working with HBC
5. Reprioritise Community transport to assist with food and other supply needs and to support any essential passenger transport that other volunteers/voluntary groups may find difficult during lock down
6. Provide a clear point of contact from HBC LRC staff and Cllrs to liaise with voluntary sector.
7. Restart weekly Coordinating group meetings. We are maintaining excellent contact via Google Groups and regular communications to ensure other groups are aware of the need for and receive support with contingency planning.

**In case of query or for further information please contact**

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