

# Communities and Localism Select Committee Inquiry into the effectiveness of covid-19 grants

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## Message from the Inquiry Chairman



“On behalf of the inquiry group, I would like to pass on our sincere thanks and appreciation to all those people who gave up their valuable time to talk to us as part of our evidence gathering. We have been inspired by the voluntary work being undertaken throughout Buckinghamshire and want to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has helped us through the pandemic which has strengthened and renewed our belief in the power of local communities.

The Inquiry Group hopes that this report will enable the Council to build upon its strong links with the voluntary sector and to play an even greater role in facilitating change through stronger partnership working leading to resilient and protected local communities across Buckinghamshire.”

Paul Irwin, Chairman of the Communities and Localism Select Committee and Inquiry Group

Members of the Inquiry Group were :-

Paul Irwin (Stone and Waddesdon), Chairman of Trustees Bernwode Community Bus  
Peter Cooper (Wing, Chairman of The Queens Park Arts Centre, Aylesbury  
Mimi Harker (Amersham and Chesham Bois), Chairman of Community Impact Bucks, Vice Patron Oasis Partnership, Member of Amersham Action Group  
Graham Peart (Ridgeway East and West), Member of Heart of Bucks, Chair of Trustees One Can Trust  
Linda Smith (Chalfont St Peter), Member of Chalfont St Peter Village Action Group  
Ashley Waite (Stone and Waddesdon), Member of Bernwode Community Bus, Wednesday Club



*“The way in which we saw charities and volunteers collectively support their communities during lockdown was a clear example of the immense difference the sector makes to our society. Despite this, the voluntary sector will inevitably shrink in the immediate future. Public income being the main source of income growth means that social distancing restrictions and a reduction in people’s disposable incomes will have a direct impact on charities’ incomes. Undoubtedly, this will result in job losses, a possible reduction in services and the closure of some charities. Every day counts here. I’m hearing from charities whose income has disappeared overnight but still have to run services for their communities. Many of them have very little emergency cash to tide them over, and even those that do will run out in a matter of weeks.”*

Chief Executive, National Council for Voluntary Organisations



## Aim of the Inquiry

The Communities and Localism Select Committee agreed to set up an Inquiry to assess the effectiveness of community organisation grants during the Covid-19 pandemic. At the onset of the covid-19 pandemic local people were really engaged in participating in a community response. Many organised themselves into groups or partnered with established organisations to provide assistance and support to their neighbours. In the absence of community boards being established a Councillor Crisis fund was initiated, utilising £250K of public health money allocated to the community boards, with a further £50k received from the Rothschild Foundation.

Whilst recognising that the funding process had to be set-up quickly, the Inquiry Group wanted to highlight lessons learnt to provide recommendations on the management of community grants for any future pandemic ensuring that:-

- there are no gaps or duplicate services,
- that resources are being used effectively and efficiently providing value for money for all residents through good partnership working,
- benefits are provided which may have a long term impact on communities.

## Background on the Councillor Crisis Fund

Buckinghamshire became a unitary council in April 2020 literally as the pandemic hit so there had not been time to set up new structures. 16 Community Boards enabled Members to work together with partners to meet the needs of the local communities and were seen as an integral part of the new unitary council; many Community Boards had their first meetings in July but formal processes needed to be put in place to grant funding. The Service area were proactive from the start of the pandemic working with the Strategic Funding Group, Community Impact Bucks and other voluntary and community sector (VCS) partners by establishing the Councillor Crisis Fund to allow councillors in all 16 community board areas to support local and community groups in responding to the needs of vulnerable residents during the crisis. The criteria were a maximum grant of £2000 which should directly meet the needs of vulnerable residents affected by the covid-19 situation and support activity that was in accordance with the Government's current public health position. An application form needed to be filled in which needed to have the support of at least three Buckinghamshire councillors in the relevant Community Board area.

## Evidence gathering and Methodology

During the process the following people have been invited to give evidence; Strategic Funding Group, Cabinet Member for Communities and Public Health and Service Director, Community Impact Bucks, Community Board Chairmen, representatives from Birmingham Voluntary Service Council and Birmingham City Council on Neighbourhood Network Scheme, Local Support Hub officers, 11 food Community Groups and 17 other Community Groups (Mental Health and Finance).

Inquiries are inevitably about making recommendations but one thing that must be said about the way in which the council and partners responded is that this funding was a 'lifesaver' and that organisations and volunteers could not have operated without it. One organisation said that they were catapulted beyond their wildest dreams when demand doubled over night and this funding gave them the capacity to respond. Organisations gave examples of where they could expand their services beyond their normal clients for example, Intensive Care Staff were invited to Lindengate 'Rest and Reflect Programme'. Examples of how the Councillor Crisis Fund was used are showcased throughout the report. A questionnaire was sent out to Community Groups and Members about their views on the Councillor Crisis Fund, the results of which are at Appendix 1 of this report 76% of Members gave a 4 or a 5 out of five for the success of the scheme and 92% of community groups gave a

4 or 5 (5 being the top mark).

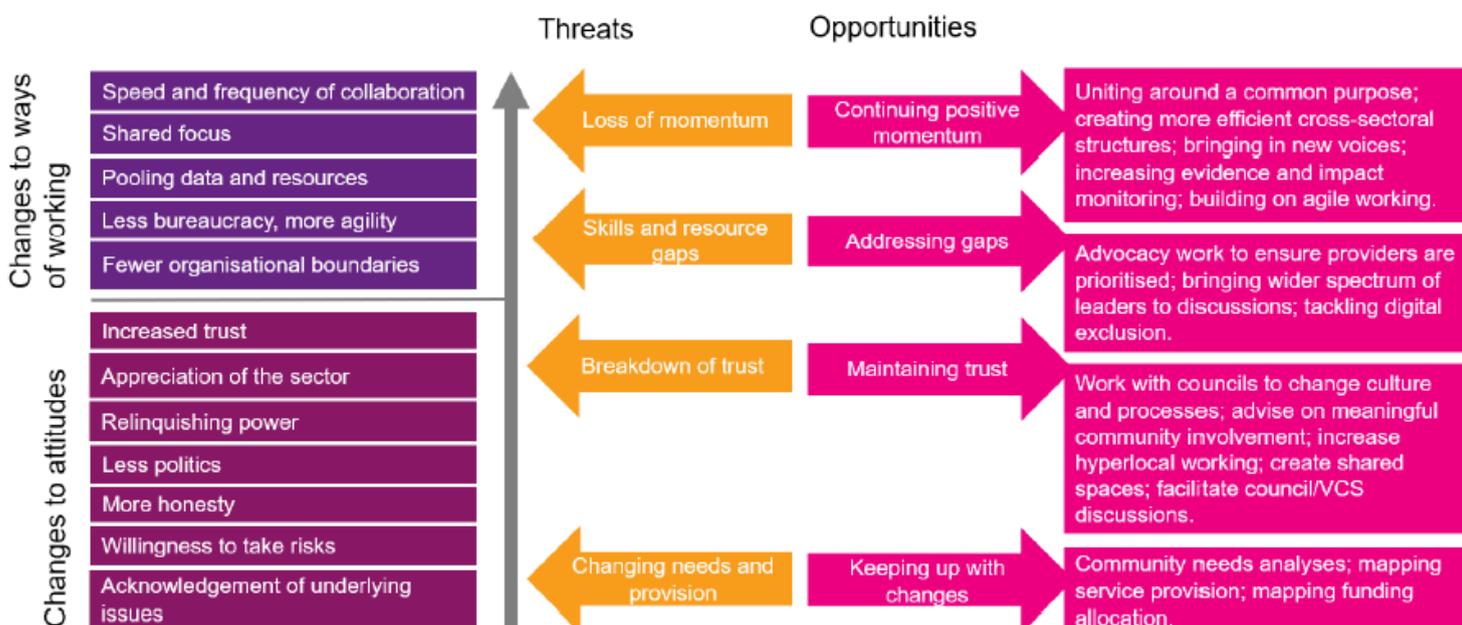
Through the questionnaires and evidence gathering sessions we also asked about lessons learnt regarding the distribution of grants which were:-

- duplication of service in some areas
- one Community Board refusing an application that is agreed by another
- ensuring funding was spent appropriately rather than grants given out quickly to utilise the additional budget.
- concerns about grants being given to those who are more vocal and able to fill in bid applications
- some smaller organisations were not aware or felt unable to apply for funding
- the need to co-ordinate unmet needs better
- capturing volunteers and organisations who were able to mobilise and deliver at times of crisis
- the need to power to flex and change; addressing Covid was about the speed of delivery not the quantum
- there were different approaches in lockdown 1 and 2 because of lessons learnt.

**Extract from Co-ordination in Place supplied by Rothschild Foundation – Research involving Buckinghamshire Council**

As part of the Inquiry we also drew upon desktop research and during the meeting with the Strategic Funding Group the Head of Grants referred us to this piece of work which they carried out with the NPC who are the think tank and consultancy for the charity sector. This report is about how they can effectively fund and co-ordinate local action to support people in most need and was carried out in Buckinghamshire, Sutton and Coventry.

<https://www.thinknpc.org/coordination-in-place-project/>



“As we reflect on how organisations have responded to the crisis, it’s clear that some of the positive shifts we’ve described above are harder to sustain in the long term than others. There is a recognition that the key mechanisms of change are likely to dissipate in the coming months, and that this may give way to old attitudes and ways of working returning. By identifying what threatens these changes the most, we believe organisations will be in a better position to take the required steps to overcome these threats based on their individual contexts.”

The Inquiry Group heard evidence from a number of stakeholders and recognise the threats mentioned above. However, they have been inspired through the evidence gathering sessions about the breadth of support given

to communities through time and money. One of the questions asked through the questionnaire and evidence gathering session was whether the councillor crisis fund provided value for money. 94% of community groups gave a 4/5 out of 5 and 62% of members gave a 4/5 out of 5. This question was about what additional benefits this funding has meant, which has included support for IT and new volunteers from a younger demographic e.g. Lindengate have currently 20+ volunteers under 24. The funding has enabled groups to adopt new ways of working and equip themselves for future emergencies.

## Recommendations

The Inquiry Group have identified a set of recommendations which are listed below which will be considered by Cabinet. The Inquiry Group recognised that some of these recommendations will require working in partnership with other organisations but would like the Council to take a lead. The Inquiry Group believe that we cannot under estimate the value of the voluntary sector to the Council, in supporting our services and sometimes delaying the need for residents to access council services and what it would cost to replace. The financial impact on the Council and other statutory partners, due to the increased burden on services would be undeliverable. A small amount of funding for the voluntary sector goes a long way. Therefore, the Inquiry Group have made recommendations about the legacy of volunteering, continued support for funding and the need to adapt to respond to unmet needs.

**Recommendation One – Recognising the work of our Local Heroes to continue to raise awareness for further volunteering and fundraising**

**Recommendation Two – To continue the effective collaboration of the strategic partnership to protect the voluntary sector**

**Recommendation Three – To review the funding process to enable all community groups to have equal opportunities to access funding**

**Recommendation Four – Building the Volunteer response**

**Recommendation Five – Supporting smaller voluntary and community groups – recognising the benefit of smaller agile grass root organisations to complement the larger more established voluntary organisations**

**Recommendation Six – The Council should continue to work with strategic partners to form a Buckinghamshire Food Partnership**

**Recommendation Seven – The Council needs to focus resource towards reducing loneliness and social isolation**

## Recommendation One – Recognising the work of our Local Heroes to continue to raise awareness for further volunteering and fundraising

At the last Buckinghamshire Council meeting before the election, a one-minute clap should be held at the beginning of the meeting to say thank you to all those who helped during the pandemic. We can also recognise the work of our Local Heroes by continuing to raise awareness by promoting and publicising the excellent work of the voluntary sector to help encourage volunteering and fundraising

### Evidence

Community Groups enjoyed attending the Inquiry Group sessions to showcase the work they had carried out during the pandemic and it would be great to pay a public tribute to everybody's efforts through the one-minute clap.

The Buckinghamshire Director of Public Health Annual Report has stated that “Working with GPs and all partners to prevent illness, improve vaccination coverage and working with the voluntary sector on health and wellbeing was as important 100 years ago as it was today.”

It would therefore be beneficial to have a social media campaign to highlight the work of local organisations and the benefits of volunteering. In addition, Community Boards could have a regular item on their agenda to showcase the work of local groups and this could also be included in the Council and Community Board newsletter. The Inquiry Group highlighted the Proud of Bucks awards and suggested that the work of Community Groups could also be highlighted by a ‘Volunteer or Community Group of the month’. The Proud of Bucks awards were sponsored by the Clare Foundation. Founder and Chairman Mike Clare said “At the Clare Foundation our ethos is all about working with partners to create positive change in Buckinghamshire. The Proud of Bucks awards show that there is a wonderful spirit of community in Buckinghamshire”. The COVID-19 pandemic had highlighted the incredible lengths that people will go to help and support one another. These awards aimed to recognise and applaud the outstanding efforts carried out by many local individuals, groups, and organisations across Buckinghamshire. Community Impact Bucks also hosts volunteer awards.

<https://www.bucksc.gov.uk/services/community/proud-of-bucks-awards/>

It is important to also recognise the role of fundraising which should be acknowledged as being an important element of emergency funding. For example, a considerable sum has been donated from fundraising. There are regular clubs that fundraise for example, the Rotary and Lions Club.

The Inquiry Group want to pay tribute to the work carried out by the Council and recognise that Buckinghamshire has been unique in its approach to funding. At the first evidence gathering session, they heard from the National Lottery representative for the Thames Valley who said what was being delivered in Buckinghamshire was unique. The mechanism of the Strategic Funding Group enabled further funding into Buckinghamshire and meant funding for a number of different organisations. “The Strategic Funding Group has opened doorways for us in order to better connect with communities and help us understand the role we play as a national funder”.

Buckinghamshire, Birmingham and Lancashire have also been recognised for best practice in the Local Government Association guide on Covid-19. Buckinghamshire Council and Birmingham have been complimented on their approach to the voluntary sector, as other areas have had a more ‘top down approach’ which has not been as effective for working truly in partnership with the voluntary sector throughout this crisis.

[LGA guide on Covid-19](#)

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# A big THANK YOU to our local lockdown heroes:-

Below are some of the news stories highlighting the proactive response from the Council, strategic partners, existing voluntary organisations and newer smaller community groups which sprung up in response to the needs of residents during the pandemic

## Aylesbury councillor calls for 'legacy of volunteering' after coronavirus crisis

On Tuesday's daily video update from Buckinghamshire Council the community work on a large Aylesbury estate by a group of volunteers was highlighted.



**Buckinghamshire Council launches new Community Hub with #ProudofBucks**

The new Buckinghamshire Council is encouraging residents, community groups and businesses to share what they are doing in their local community to support the people of Buckinghamshire in a central community hub.

By Thomas Barford

## Amersham community comes together coronavirus

By Kiera Gillies | @kiera\_bfp  
Apprentice reporter



190434 Looking E. view of the Kings Arms hotel in the foreground and the Market Hall in the mid-ground. High St, Amersham. 1920s and 2019 - pictures by Julia Swift.

0 comment

Shops, restaurants and bars across the UK have been shutting and many organisations have been coming together to help the more vulnerable during the current coronavirus crisis.

## Over £1 million distributed to Bucks coronavirus pandemic began

By Matt Jell | @mattjell



Over £1m in grants have been distributed to local volunteering organisations, community groups, charities and individuals during the coronavirus pandemic.

**Cllr awards**  
LGU CCLA

**COLLABORATIVE WORKING AWARD 2020**

Raj Khan Niknam Hussain Waheed Raja

Buckinghamshire Council

**THE RISBOROUGH BASKET**

Local stores delivered FREE today

## Geographical examples across Buckinghamshire

### Food boxes prepared by Restore Hope (Latimer)



All it takes is one person to restore hope. This organisation created a new market garden to provide long term sustainability of fresh vegetable boxes. Every seed and plant was donated by the community. They partnered with Chiltern Foodbank and over 60 local organisations and churches. They packed 400 dry food boxes, 1100 kids big boxes of hope and 1000 easter boxes. They have created the FoodLife project to provide families with healthy fresh food.

### Mental Health (Road Farm Great Missenden) – Tent in the Orchard



With the current covid pandemic Road Farm believe that there would be a significant number of people locally suffering mental health issues arising from losing loved ones or, being isolated with lack of social contact. They provided a space to allow people the opportunity to recover and reintegrate in a quiet relaxed atmosphere. They used £1000 of the Councillor Crisis Fund.

### Wycombe Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme



“Mauricio” who lives in a hostel but is ready to move on has been found a studio flat at an affordable rent. Using funds provided by the Councillor Crisis Fund they pay his rent in advance, issue a Deposit Guarantee and he moves in. Additional support is given to help him claim Universal Credit housing costs and Council Tax reduction and this helps him sustain his tenancy. With the vacancy at the hostel “Tim” a long-term rough sleeper moves in and the Councillor Crisis Fund provides financial help to make this happen.

### Seeability Aylesbury



Seeability provide support for people with learning disabilities and autism, many of whom have sight loss. SeeAbility provides specialist, tailored support and were able reach out to more people through digital therapies and activities. Being able to continue to deliver support safely throughout the pandemic has reduced the impact of the pandemic on disabled people, reducing the need for more costly interventions in the future.

### Wendover Dementia Group



Covid-related restrictions ended face-to-face meetings from March 2020 onwards. We saw stresses caused by the resulting isolation. Stresses suffered by carers as well as those with dementia, also their families. Volunteers give their time for free but we needed help to pay for the new need for more communication, such as newsletters, greetings cards & envelopes and telephone costs. This is how we used the Councillor Crisis Fund.

## Recommendation Two – To continue the effective collaboration of the strategic partnership to protect the voluntary sector by;

- A. Ensuring key decision makers are represented on the Strategic Funding Group to address the needs of Buckinghamshire and local communities. As part of this and other work carried out by the Council, it is important to continue looking at efficiencies to obtain value for money with all grant funding and to be able to position, flex and change direction as required so we can be quick to act
- B. Considering how the Council’s review of its estate and community assets could identify possible properties that could support the voluntary sector.

2A. Ensuring key decision makers representing the Council are represented on the Strategic Funding Group to address the needs of Buckinghamshire and local communities. As part of this and other work carried out by the Council, it is important to continue looking at efficiencies to obtain value for money with all grant funding and to be able to position, flex and change direction as required so we can be quick to act

### Evidence

- Following discussions with the Strategic Funding Group (SFG) at the first evidence gathering session the first recommendation was identified by the Inquiry Group including the recommendation on funding navigators (see recommendation 3).
- The SFG includes VCS leaders with Henry Allmand, Chief Executive of Heart of Bucks, Martin Gallagher Chief Executive Officer of the Clare Foundation, Mark Ormerod, Chairman of the VCS Recovery Board, Ellie Stout Head of Grants, Rothschild Foundation, Tracey Smith, Funding Manager for Thames Valley for the National Lottery and the Cabinet Member and Service Director. With reference to the above quote from Co-ordination in Place about the key mechanisms of change being likely to dissipate in the coming months, which may give way to old attitudes and ways of working returning, the Inquiry Group wanted to put a recommendation in to ensure that the amazing work being carried out by Buckinghamshire’s SFG is protected into the future.
- Since March 2020 Heart of Bucks, Buckinghamshire Council, The Clare Foundation, Leap, The Rothschild Foundation and The National Lottery Community Fund came together to ensure over £1.5 million of emergency funds and grants were swiftly distributed to local charities and community groups with a coordinated approach. The group help maximise funding opportunities and also look to help the sector stabilise and recover.
- During the pandemic, the Strategic Funding Group Emergency Group wanted to work in a collaborative way to deliver funding into Buckinghamshire, quickly and efficiently. Processes were set up to share data and this included all the grants that were made which was organised thematically.

In terms of looking at efficiencies to obtain value for money with all grant funding:-

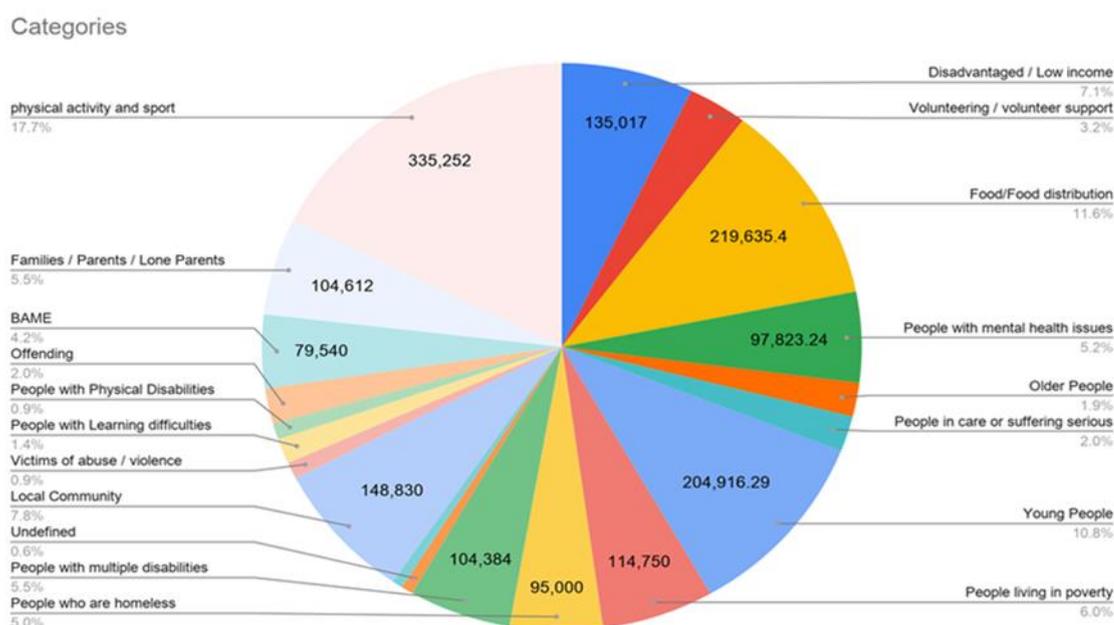
- The SFG looked at the mapping of provision and the need for strategic oversight focusing on food, volunteers, smaller community organisations and the need to repurpose delivery to support residents during the pandemic. They provided information on websites to enable signposting, cutting through red tape whilst maintaining due diligence around funding and to scale up projects where required. Health impact assessments and business intelligence were used to identify need and value for money.
- The Inquiry Group heard that a Community Board Chairman has the monitoring of funding applications as a standard item on his agenda to ensure value for money.
- The mechanism of this Group levered further funding into Buckinghamshire from the National Lottery.

There was £1.3 million of funding into Bucks and 75% of organisations have never applied to National Lottery before.

- The benefit of the Strategic Funding Group was that they were local organisations with local knowledge. As mentioned before some of their funding have set up organisations for the future embracing digital delivery. Accessibility was key during the pandemic as everything moved online e.g. care homes using video calls. The Rothschild Foundation have worked with local partners using online round tables to connect with hard to reach groups which has been successful. A specialist grants team made things happen if people had difficulties e.g. with technology.

One comment made through the questionnaire was that it would be helpful to see a report of the geographical breakdown, the sector breakdown and the size of organisations supported. The graphs in this report are supplied courtesy of the Strategic Funding Group.

### Distribution of funding across the County by category



The Inquiry Group recognised that it was important to be able to position, flex and change direction as required so the Council could be quick to act and were provided with the following evidence:-

- The VCS Recovery Board is one of the four thematic partnerships tackling the long term social, economic and environment challenges arising from Covid-19 pandemic in the county and involves partners such as Leap, Action4Youth, The Clare Foundation, Heart of Bucks, Rothschild Foundation, Community Impact Bucks, Oasis Partnership, Wycombe Homeless, One Can Trust, Citizens Advice, Age UK Bucks Mind. They will enable more joined up thinking for future emergency responses and help drive recovery forward in a more co-ordinated manner.
- There needs to be flexibility to change direction to meet unmet need and unidentified needs; with the impact of the pandemic there will be financial insecurity, increasing debt and food poverty, mental health support, youth mentoring and homelessness. Birmingham were asked what they would do differently and they commented that they would look at the statistics relating to the impact of a particular crisis on certain areas of the community and direct focus accordingly, for example BAME communities. In Buckinghamshire, the Strategic Funding Group identified support to BAME communities as a gap and set up a funding stream for this area however they struggled to find

applications for groups coming forward. A BAME Infrastructure Group has now been set up which should help to address this.

- Some of the community groups have been set up for future emergencies but others who haven't applied for funding will still need support. The digital skills gap is likely to have an even stronger influence on which charities survive the crisis and which ones do not. Community Boards may want to consider this when looking at prioritising future funding applications.

2B. Considering how the Council's review of its estate and community assets could identify possible properties that could support the voluntary sector.

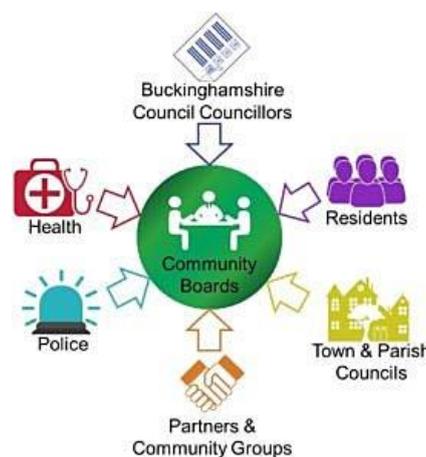
### Evidence

- A number of organisations are paying considerable rent for their premises. For example, Aylesbury Vineyard Foodbank who also require additional space for food. It would be helpful to have the flexibility to use community assets on a temporary basis to help in emergencies at a reduced cost and to investigate whether there are opportunities across the whole of the public estate in Buckinghamshire.
- There were also interesting initiatives taking place such as the Community Fridge being extended in Chalfont St Giles where a kitchen was being set up in a Council Car Park. This kitchen would not just provide assistance for the covid-19 pandemic but would help with longer term problems such as food poverty.

## Recommendation Three – To review the funding process to enable all community groups to have equal opportunities to access funding by:-

- A. Providing funding navigators to help community groups access funding in Buckinghamshire. The Strategic Funding Group in partnership with the funding navigators, at a more local level, can review how all grants are currently distributed to ensure that funding is fast tracked when required and outcome focussed with an accessible system for applications
- B. Providing as much certainty of longer term funding as the Council is able so that voluntary and community organisations can plan ahead
- C. Review the application process for Community Boards as follows:-
  - Identifying the benefits of Community Boards having a Small Grant Fund to empower smaller community groups where a small grant can bring huge benefits
  - Undertaking a review of the criteria of the Community Board application process to see whether it should be more closely aligned with the Public Health Assessment and to ensure a consistent approach to applications to more than one Board

“79% of the voluntary sector registered charities have less than £100,000 turnover and contribute an enormous amount to the health and wellbeing and economy of the county” Katie Higginson CIB



3A. Providing funding navigators to help community groups access funding in Buckinghamshire. The Strategic Funding Group in partnership with the funding navigators, at a more local level, can review how all grants are currently distributed to ensure that funding is fast tracked when required and outcome focussed with an accessible system for applications

### Evidence

- Following discussion with the Strategic Funding Group in the first evidence gathering session, the Inquiry Group could see the merit in having a more formalised system in place to show how funding could be obtained perhaps through a flowchart and that a better outcome must always be the focus.
- Grants could be given a higher priority where match funding is available and it would be helpful to identify expertise to leverage funding. Another area to prioritise grants was where collaboration was taking place. However, one community organisation did emphasise that it was important to collaborate with the right partner otherwise this could cause difficulties.
- External funding applications can be quite complicated and expertise is needed to ensure these funding opportunities were exploited. There needs to be a balance between bureaucracy and proper accountability. The National Lottery has changed their application process and are now accepting

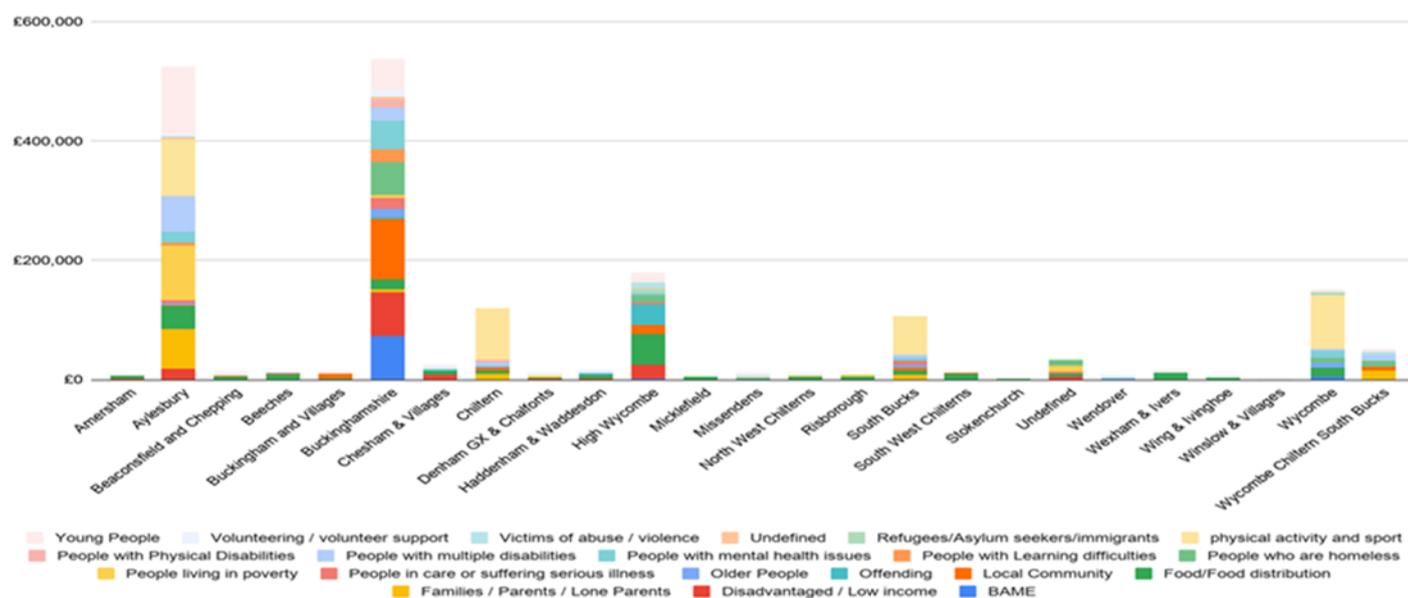
videos, for example as a form of application to ensure funding is accessible to all. The Cabinet Member for Communities and Public Health had looked at a common form for all applications but this would be difficult to co-ordinate across a number of trustees who required different information for each of their organisations. A simple expression of interest form could be helpful for smaller community organisations.

- It was important to ensure that there was no wrong front door and that there was clear signposting to ensure that funding went to the right organisation.
- CIB supported over 400 charitable organisations last year which could be registered charities, voluntary groups or social enterprises. Online training had been provided during the pandemic, including advice such as GDPR, safeguarding and pro bona charity law experts etc. Funding advice was one of the top areas provided by CIB ranging from alerting groups to new funding opportunities and advising on how to submit an effective funding bid. They also advise on fundraising and bring in additional funding for the voluntary sector.

The Inquiry Group agreed that it was important to ensure that funding is fast tracked when required and outcome focussed with an accessible system for applications and were provided with the following evidence:-

- The Rothschild report refers to increasing programmes of work where organisations can unite around a common purpose. The report also refers to councils being supported to carry out detailed needs analyses that are focused on current need, the medium and long term. This would be key for lobbying government for future resources. There are still a large number of groups who were not involved in the crisis and it is important to draw them into the conversation and map what is available and happening on the ground to ensure inclusivity in solution design and also reduce duplication and inefficiencies.
- Some participants in the Rothschild study referred to having a poor understanding of needs and how they vary between communities. Similarly, there is often not a strong understanding of how provision and funding are distributed to meet these needs. Participants spoke of efforts to map needs and services within the local area to understand where the gaps are and how to fill them, though they commented that these efforts take a lot of time and weren't always supported by local infrastructure bodies or the council. The Council now has a directory which has been really helpful for signposting residents.
- Some internal and external funding can come with a timeline and there was concern that there could be a knee jerk reaction to spending money which could result in applications being processed quickly to spend the money when further time could help a more considered approach.
- In one case the relationship between a support group and Parish council broke down and it was emphasised that it was helpful that funding and delivery was owned by the same organisation in order to empower them to act, where possible.
- There is also a concern that the Council will favour those groups who were more present in the crisis, particularly during any tendering process.
- A Member commented in the questionnaire "The problem is that, once organisations know that there is the possibility of grant funding if they can show they meet the criteria, there is a high risk of some organisations making an application when the money or the project are not really urgently needed ... and given the current state of public finances, such grants should only be made available when they are really urgent. The availability of funds will create needs that would not otherwise have existed. I feel this is the right time for austerity in the distribution of public funds. Clearly, there is a strong case for such grants during a time of crisis, but I think the bar for eligibility should be set high."
- This recommendation is linked to recommendation two with regard to thoughts about having two different processes for larger and smaller community groups.

## Funding received in each category – centrally and via Councillor Crisis Fund



3B. Providing as much certainty of longer term funding as the Council is able so that voluntary and community organisations can plan ahead

### Evidence

- The Chief Executive of CIB told the Inquiry Group that the voluntary sector is still grappling with a decade of austerity which has been exacerbated with the recent crisis. More than half of the organisations responding to the CIB state of the sector survey 2019 said they were drawing on their reserves pre crisis for day to day costs not just strategic development. The voluntary sector was a key partner in the recovery phrase empowering communities to drive changes they want to see.
- The report “Co-ordination In Place” (Rothschild Foundation) says that there could be a breakdown of trust as Council funding pressures risk creating less transparency over budget allocations and less prioritisation of issues.
- There should be a clearer process for larger community organisations in terms of applying for funding and to consider whether this should be part of the Community Board process – for example One Can Trust believed that it would be helpful to have a Service Level Agreement and certainty of longer term funding. Another example was discussed; the Citizens Advice Bureau was the largest recipient of grants from all legacy councils. As CAB will have an important part to play in supporting residents with financial insecurity, it might be appropriate to have a central SLA arrangement. This should be considered during the Grants Review.
- There should be further clarity around long term funding for the voluntary sector with signposting to external and internal funding through Community Boards
- Whilst we cannot underestimate the voluntary sector, it can often be unclear to residents that a major part of funding for community organisations has been given through council and external funding and it was important to recognise this. The outcome of the Council’s grant review was eagerly awaited and will be vital to enabling the VCS to continue their work in the County.
- The Inquiry Group also heard from Winslow Big Society who stated that an authority that disregarded the voluntary sector was very short sighted. They provided the root and branches of our communities. In times of economic austerity, the Council may be subject to change and reduced funding resources but the voluntary sector and its communities would always remain resilient.

3C. Identifying the benefits of Community Boards having a Small Grant Fund to empower smaller community groups where a small grant can bring huge benefits and undertaking a review of the criteria of the Community Board application process to see whether it should be more closely aligned with the Public Health Assessment and to ensure a consistent approach to applications to more than one Board

#### Evidence

- It would be helpful to undertake a mapping exercise of small community groups
- The Inquiry Group suggests setting up a Small Grants Fund to issue grants of up to £1000; this could be a fund of £10,000, ringfenced from existing budgets.
- Haddenham and Waddesdon Community Board were looking at setting up a Small Grants Panel. Reference was made earlier to Birmingham Small Grants Panel which is helpful in protecting funding for smaller community groups. Some smaller parishes and community groups were put off applying for funding because of the application process and some of them did not have access to a bank account. As mentioned earlier a small amount of funding for these Groups can go a long way.

The Inquiry Group agreed that it would be helpful to undertake a review of the criteria of the Community Board application process to see whether it should be more closely aligned with the Public Health Assessment and to ensure a consistent approach to applications to more than one Board and heard the following evidence:-

- Community Boards have only been recently set up so they need time to develop - the Council intends to undertake a review of these Boards after they have been operating for a year. The Communities and Localism Select Committee also have this included in their Work Programme.
- The Inquiry Group heard that some organisations had applied to more than one Community Board for funding and their application was turned down in one area and successful in another. There should be a degree of consistency in how Community Boards approach applications for funding. There also needs to be further clarity around the geography of community boards. One Parish Council referred to requesting funding from another Community Board, in addition to their own, but were turned down because of the location of the community group, even though they helped residents in both areas.
- The Inquiry Group felt that the Community Boards should continue to monitor how the funding is being spent and this should be compared across all the Community Boards. The Community Board Co-ordinator would be able to identify any duplication in funding and ensure a range of support was offered across themes such as mental health, food and financial insecurity.
- The Inquiry Group heard from the Strategic Funding Group if organisations apply for funding for another year the organisation has to provide accountability for the previous year's grant. This could be considered when the Community Board application process is reviewed.
- Community Boards need to be proactive with their funding in building community resilience and capacity, not a reactive provider of grants to historical groups. It was important to link funding to clear need and evidence such as the public health report and local priorities.
- Feedback from the questionnaire and Inquiry sessions showed that the councillor crisis fund was very positive in terms of speed of response and there were very few hurdles to jump in contrast with national government funding which is only now being made available with requirement to spend by end of this financial year. However, the Inquiry Group heard that there was some concern regarding a few barriers to accessing the fund, due to a lack of clarity around criteria. The application process having a direct approach to councillors was really appealing to well-connected organisations but could have excluded others.

*Considering different structures and commissioning arrangements – Inquiry Group’s observation*

- The Inquiry Group looked at two other areas as a comparison to the way Buckinghamshire operated in distributing covid-19 grants. Birmingham Voluntary Services Council and Birmingham City Council attended the Inquiry Group meeting to talk about their Neighbourhood Network Scheme “The very existence of NNS shows that Birmingham is already leading the way in using a locality based approach to adult social care. By developing communities in this way, harnessing the knowledge and skills of the NNSs, we can see a truly preventative strategy, which should lead to better outcomes for Birmingham’s citizens.” The Scheme brings together voluntary, community and social enterprise sector organisations and groups, as well as statutory agencies to engage with, work with and support older adults and communities which is organised by a “lead facilitator” with delegated responsibilities and budgets from Birmingham City Council to implement and manage the Neighbourhood Network Scheme in each Constituency. Each area also invests in and supports the development of community assets, as well as the individuals, groups and organisations who are delivering community activity (see recommendation about community assets). The NNS also have a micro and small grants scheme recognising the need to support smaller groups.
- ***The Inquiry Group were impressed with Birmingham’s bottom up approach which was led by local communities, however they commented that they welcomed the structure of Community Boards and Member involvement in supporting grants to local communities. They also were impressed by the Small Grants Scheme to help smaller community groups.***
- Contact was also made with Lancashire County Council who has set up a memorandum of understanding between Community Foundations and all the local councils. They were also recognised as providing best practice, as well as Birmingham, by the Local Government Association in the way they distributed grants during the covid-19 pandemic by establishing the Covid 19 Charitable Fund. They have set a number of agreed objectives such as mental wellbeing, debt support, emergency support and helping people who have recently left hospital to recover at home. They asked for donations via virgin money giving.com. A Funding Panel was set up to ensure that there was a clear benefit of the project or service which aligned with the agreed objective. The Community Foundations are then asked to report to the donors.
- The Prime Minister has launched a new framework for public procurement to level the playing field for smaller organisations to win more contracts. As can be seen by the two external examples above Buckinghamshire could always move to a new form of commissioning for example using Heart of Bucks to disseminate money which they can process through a grants committee with some accountability. ***The Inquiry Group would like to see the Grants Review revisit the commissioning of contracts to identify improvements. However, they were strongly of the opinion that they liked the Kruger ‘local community approach’ which has already been set up through Community Boards. (Further information supplied on the Kruger report below). Birmingham made a decision that Community Foundations should not manage the grant process. The advantages were that Heart of England experts provided streamlined and efficient paperwork and were good at managing and monitoring. However, one of the disadvantages was relationship building with small local assets and the importance of local knowledge. They felt a bottom up approach was better and chose to devolve funding in a similar manner to Buckinghamshire.***

## Recommendation Four – Building the Volunteer response by:-

- A. Having a Campaign to reach out to our Lockdown Heroes to encourage them to continue the legacy of volunteer work which could help strategic partnerships to build a volunteer army for Buckinghamshire to provide a response to any emergency
- B. Reviewing whether more can be done to encourage staff to take up volunteer roles by developing an Employer Supported Volunteering Procedure



*“In a crisis mutual aid groups are an important part of the response but there is more to be done strategically to prepare for another crisis.”*

Katie Higginson, Chief Executive of Community Impact Bucks

*“We had the permission to put down our juggling priorities in this hand and just focus on one thing.”*

Buckinghamshire Council employee (Rothschild Report)

4A. Having a Campaign to reach out to our Lockdown Heroes to encourage them to continue the legacy of volunteer work which could help strategic partnerships to build a volunteer army for Buckinghamshire to provide a response to any emergency

### Evidence

- The Kruger Report Levelling up our Communities “sets out a vision for a more local, more human, less bureaucratic, less centralised society in which people are supported and empowered to play an active role in their neighbourhood”.
- The report was commissioned by the Prime Minister and it goes on to say that the country needs a new era of community power and talks about a Community Power Act to give local people power over the design and delivery of public services. The Inquiry Group agrees that Buckinghamshire Council is already on its way with the structure of Community Boards and its bottom up approach to the recent pandemic. During the first 2020 lockdown there was always a balance of central control versus local devolution but as suggested by the Kruger Report it was important that local councillors in their areas determined how money is spent with their local knowledge and networks.

<https://www.dannykruger.org.uk/communities-report>

- In order to encourage innovation, it was important to move away from traditional models. Katie Higginson in the second evidence gathering session said that there was a real appetite for volunteering when the offer is absolutely right. Helpers may not even class themselves as a volunteer and it was important to have a flexible arrangement to encourage motivation e.g. volunteer for one hour a week

by helping with shopping. People want to support their communities and strategic partners need to drive this.

- Some volunteers may not want to go on a database so it is important that the Council is creative about embracing recent volunteers, many of whom have been from the younger age group during the current crisis and volunteering needs to be made attractive and accessible to everyone.

The Inquiry Group heard evidence that it would be helpful to build a volunteer army for Buckinghamshire to provide an emergency response as follows:-

- Another of Kruger's recommendations is that a reserve army of volunteers should be created to help respond to future emergencies, from pandemics to fires, floods and environmental disasters. It is really key to build on the huge surge in volunteering during the lockdown.
- At a discussion with CIB at an Inquiry Session it was suggested that it would be helpful to set up a central co-ordinated approach to emergencies with the voluntary and community sector so that all organisations can react quickly to any further emergencies without duplication of effort, noting that unregulated pop up groups would be able to respond faster than more formal organisations as they are not restricted by guidelines. For future emergencies there is an opportunity for the Council and voluntary sector to be more prepared e.g CIB is working with the Council Flood Management Team on a proposal to upskill communities on flood resilience (this has been funded by Heart of Bucks). The voluntary sector should become part of the strategic planning for emergencies to allow us to have a system in place before the crisis hits.
- The Community Groups questionnaire had a comment that during the crisis "Local residents helped people of different faiths and cultures work together in a positive way to build new relationships and volunteer together for the good of local people."

4B. Reviewing whether more can be done to encourage staff to take up volunteer roles by developing an Employer Supported Volunteering Procedure

### Evidence

Gareth Williams, Buckinghamshire Council's Cabinet Member for Communities and Public Health said: "It's incredibly heartening to see the way in which so many members of staff have responded to community needs since we were hit by this virus. Often working long hours in completely new roles, they have made an incredible contribution and helped Bucks residents stay safe, fed and cared for. It makes me really #ProudofBucks."

- In terms of volunteers the partnership with the Council was crucial. The Council put a form on their website and 1800 people put their names forward. They were filtered into two groups; there was a list for adult social care and a longer list came to CIB. They spoke to every person on the list and only 3 people could not be contacted.
- In terms of encouraging staff to continue volunteering it was difficult to find information about the offer to staff in terms of time off to volunteer – this could be added to the information page on holidays and other time off on the staff intranet and also in job adverts. In light of covid-19 it would be helpful to review this policy to check whether the offer could be improved, particularly where this helped vulnerable residents. The Council's SAP system, where leave is booked does allow staff to book time off for volunteering. Some of the legacy Councils had an Employer Supported Volunteering Procedure which included supporting the management or governance of a voluntary organisation by becoming a trustee or member of the board.
- Volunteer trustees tend to be from an older age group and have been hit by the covid-19 pandemic in terms of shielding and being able to provide all of the support required. The Inquiry Group heard that there is a real fatigue amongst some Trustees who are also not comfortable with online technology and the potential complexities of issues. There is such a risk across the sector this could cause

organisations to close. There have been recent communications with regard to Trustees Week to encourage more people to become trustees and this could help employability skills. This was undertaken in partnership with the Local Enterprise Partnership and Bucks Business First.

<https://www.facebook.com/CommunityImpactBucks/posts/to-celebrate-trustees-week>

- The Rothschild Report refers to a risk of burnout and loss of momentum with volunteering particularly if collaboration started to feel less productive. The report also refers to a mismatch between the skills required to meet changing need and the existing skill sets across charities and other local groups.
- Managing volunteers is key and also has a cost, it can be more challenging than managing paid staff. There needs to be good training provided on volunteer management. CIB has a training video on how to support volunteers which mutual aid groups have used. There needs to be basic things in place to support a volunteer such as a clearly named supervisor who should check references and reshape voluntary opportunities to make them more suitable to match roles. One of the key rules from CIB was that if there was any concern about whether the job should be a paid role then it was important to steer away from volunteering and to maintain a paid position, even if there was a high level of unemployment.

## Recommendation Five – Supporting smaller voluntary and community groups – recognising the benefit of smaller agile grass root organisations to complement the larger more established voluntary organisations

- A Continue to recognise the independence and value of pop-up community groups to engage residents who may be worried about the stigma of approaching more formalised groups and ensure that pop up groups are supported to deliver their services safely, including formalising their group where appropriate
- B To identify structural enablers e.g. Street Associations, Community Connectors, Community Board Co-ordinators who could link local organisations together to build capacity and identify funding opportunities.

5A. Continue to recognise the independence and value of pop-up community groups to engage residents who may be worried about the stigma of approaching more formalised groups and ensure that pop up groups are supported to deliver their services safely, including formalising their group where appropriate

### Evidence

- The Inquiry Group heard from Katie Higginson who said that “Pop up groups are faster to respond rather than the formal voluntary sector which was a week/couple of weeks behind partly because of greater restraints having to navigate guidance as an employer” They also noted that a Radio 4 programme referred to importance of the speed of delivery during the pandemic rather than the quantum .... “
- A crisis always offers the opportunity of generosity of spirit, resources and cross referral between organisations and it is wise to embrace that community action and work with these groups. CIB stated that you will not stop pop up groups so it is better to work alongside them. Undoubtedly there would be some duplication of effort but it may be that the pop up groups are accessing some of the community that established groups would not. It is important to bring them into the fold and offer them support from the outset to work effectively alongside other groups. They have important local knowledge.
- Pop up groups can help restore dignity to those who feel unable to reach out to established foodbanks.
- It was important to treat everyone as an equal partner. The Inquiry Group heard from one Community Group who commented that some pop up groups had been treated as second class citizens as they were not an established group. Community groups from rural areas who were less connected did not have as much status as other community groups.
- An argument was put that the Council should make use of resources of existing organisations rather than fund pop ups. However, it was agreed that in a crisis it was better to have duplication rather than to have gaps in service and it was important not to starve innovation.

The Inquiry Group agreed that it was important to continue to ensure that pop up groups are supported to deliver their services safely and that if any pop-up groups stand down after the crisis that the needs of the vulnerable are met elsewhere by signposting. The Group were provided with the following evidence:-

- Most pop up groups communicated through Facebook and getting them to communicate through email was more challenging. It was common for pop-up groups to spring up during a crisis and then stand down once the crisis had come to an end. It was important not to quash this response but to support it safely. CIB provided 3 minute training videos to support those groups.

- A question was raised about formalising pop up groups as an example was given of a group offering legal advice and protection needed to be given to those groups from a liability point of view. Pop up groups could cover gaps in service either through location or specialised services. It was important to offer support to pop up groups to formalise if they chose too – many of them may decide not to carry on. One of the disadvantages of pop up groups could be their lack of accountability which could be a strength in reacting quickly. If there was an incentive to carry on advice could be given to set up as a Trust or to find a local organisation who they could partner with.
- CIB provide training support for pop up groups and have provided key information in partnership with Thames Valley Police to protect volunteers and individuals. This also includes information on hygiene, managing transfer of cash, personal data and GDPR.

5B. To identify structural enablers e.g. Street Associations, Community Connectors, Community Board Co-ordinators who could link local organisations together to build capacity and identify funding opportunities.

### Evidence

- The Inquiry Group felt that Community Board Co-ordinators are well placed to take a ‘holistic view’ of their local area to link voluntary groups together where it is mutually beneficial and to help spot opportunities for building their capacity. Helping link community groups will become increasingly important if there is pressure on funding.
- At the Inquiry meeting many community groups were really interested to hear what each other were doing and swapped contact information. Network meetings could be set up by Community Board Co-ordinators. It would be helpful to provide further promotion for the online directory and make sure it covered large and small community groups. <https://directory.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/>
- The Theatre Shed suggested that it would be good to have a newsletter that shares which organisations they have partnered with through this fund. Through the Inquiry Group meeting they saw some organisations that they could collaborate with. In addition, it would be good to promote funding more widely.
- Neighbourhood watch and street associations were a key asset to identifying and combatting social isolation. A Street Association brings together local residents who want to make their community stronger, friendlier and more supportive, where people belong and look out for one another as the ‘eyes and ears of the street’. Members are encouraged to start a conversation with their neighbours to know that they are safe and well.
- There were 388 street members in Buckinghamshire covering their streets, mostly condensed in the pilot areas of Aylesbury (x2), Chesham, Princes Risborough, Hughenden and Burnham. There is an entry for Street Associations on the Bucks Online Directory and enquiries are directed to the communities team. The team will then be able to identify if there is a local member to support a resident. Toolkits have been developed for groups who may wish to set up a Street Association in their area.
- Hughenden Street Association have been undertaking inspiring work for this community. At an Inquiry Session they commented that there is a role for street associations getting the community working together, looking after residents and preventing social isolation. Hilda Stern said ‘we try to connect people and bring it all together’. Each street association will be unique to their community and can identify what is missing. Hughenden have also linked in with One Can Trust to collect donations. She commented that the crisis has struck a chord with people who have turned to their community and want to volunteer. ‘There is just so much out there’. Other community groups who attended an Inquiry Session included Winslow Big Society and Better Connected Beaconsfield who were also doing similar work to Street Associations, equally inspiring.

## Recommendation Six – The Council should continue to work with strategic partners on a Buckinghamshire Food Partnership, to:-

- A. Ensure a clearer system of referral so that food is fairly distributed to the most vulnerable and that more formalised food banks are given priority over funding
- B. Build on the current mapping of community food activity (food directory) by providing mutual support, collaboration, to share resources and to target and bring in funding.

6A. Ensure a clearer system of referral so that food is fairly distributed to the most vulnerable and that more formalised food banks are given priority over funding.

### Evidence

- Reference was made to the duplication with regard to Wycombe foodbanks and that resources were being diverted from established groups to help pop up groups. There was a concern about accountability, particularly as pop up groups did not have a reliable referral system for food. One pop up community group collapsed which then had to be supported by an established group. However, the pop up group set up again dealing with fresh produce as a CIC company and unfortunately took food from the supermarket which had been relied on by the established foodbanks, who then had to buy fresh food. This issue has now been resolved by the Local Support Hub who have set up a process to signpost residents and ensure there is no duplication.
- Princes Risborough Baskets and Community Bus – this is a good example of two community organisations working together. As the community bus was not being used they reached out to Risborough Town Council who were introducing a scheme to deliver essential items, including food, to people in the community unable to leave their homes because of the restrictions, using local shops. The Scheme expanded to outlying villages. Between May and August they made 524 deliveries for those shielding. The funds provided by the councillor crisis fund went towards running the delivery service. The bus covered 535 miles with each delivery costing under £2. They have 30 volunteers.
- It is important to stop multiple beneficiaries who are not really in need and local delivery can help prevent this where known people can abuse the system.

6B. Build on the current mapping of community food activity (food directory) by providing mutual support, collaboration, to share resources and to target and bring in funding.

### Evidence

- As the pandemic continues and when the furlough scheme comes to an end, it is likely that the high demand for foodbanks will remain. Regular community food groups centred on Aylesbury, High Wycombe and Chesham should continue to meet.
- The Inquiry Group considered the Time For a Buckinghamshire Food Partnership report which recommends a campaign for rent and rates relief for businesses supporting other local businesses and farm shops. Some Councils across the UK have looked to offer empty shops with business rates relief or rent-free terms for progressive businesses. One of the points that has been made during this Inquiry is from food banks who are paying high rent and also need additional space to accommodate the increase in demand for food during the pandemic. This issue will be there in the long term with food poverty. This links back to recommendation two regarding use of council assets.
- To consider whether to have more formalised agreements with supermarkets or use an app such as 'One Can Trust' to highlight key food requirements for the vulnerable
- Another observation is that at least one if not more charities have used the councillor crisis fund to help develop a market garden to grow fruit and vegetables to put in food boxes and whether there is

potential to develop this with other charities who have land available or to cultivate unused allotment space if there is any. This could also be a good opportunity for Learning Disability Clients to volunteer or get work experience.

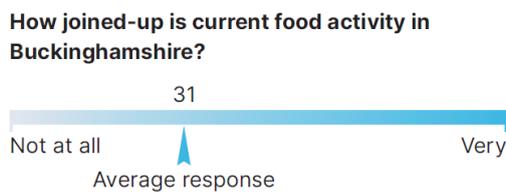
- The Inquiry Group heard that of 23 councillor crisis fund applications in Wycombe 13 were food related. People may not think that food poverty is an issue in Buckinghamshire but this figure shows a different picture. This also reflects that there may be many residents who needed to shield who live alone which then leads to social isolation. Not all residents will have family living nearby.

Food is such a basic need for all - it is important that we utilise this valuable resource to its best effect and work together with other organisations as part of a food partnership. The Inquiry Group heard of some great examples of local initiatives including:-

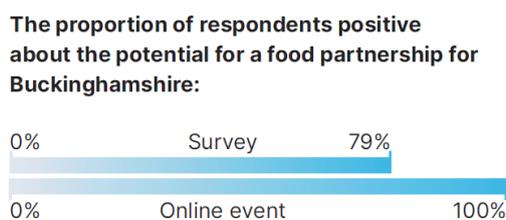
- The Time for a Buckinghamshire Food Partnership report covers a wide area including a sustainable food economy and healthy food for all. They have recommended fifteen ambitions for Buckinghamshire but the recommendations relating to this piece of work include regularly supporting or convening community food groups centred on Aylesbury, High Wycombe and Chesham and contribute to the comprehensiveness, use and promotion of the Buckinghamshire Council Directory of food services, charities, community groups and local authority support initiatives.

<https://www.sustainweb.org/bucks-food-partnership/>

Time for a Buckinghamshire Food Partnership compiled by Sustain (report commissioned by Rothschild Foundation)



*Food brings people together – sharing, talking, learning. Interconnection makes the food system richer but it is a complex system. We are all part of it.*



*A more joined-up approach should lead to better decisions, reduce costs and boost profits; enabling businesses to be more sustainable long-term. We could achieve greater food security and resilience, lower our environmental impact, and produce less waste. We could create stronger communities, and healthier people both in body and mind.*

- Buckingham Food Bank - When isolation started there was a surge in requests for food parcels. This led them to open an Emergency Centre in addition to their normal operations. However the demand outstripped the non-perishable food held in the food bank so they had to purchase additional food on top of the food being donated by the community. It also meant additional resources were needed for the fresh goods they supply with the food parcels. The grant was crucial in helping them purchase what they needed and enabled them to meet all the requests for help they received. Buckingham Food Bank is a relatively small food bank but during the lockdown they helped 2000 people with food parcels. One of the issues they faced was the need for fresh meat. The Group deliver food to residents. Local churches, schools, businesses have contributed with food so they were well stocked.
- The All Together Community Fridge project redistributed surplus food to the community and was run by volunteer groups. Food parcels are supplied to households who were struggling financially. 503 households had already been provided with food parcels. There was an increasing number of referrals

so additional facilities were being looked at and a site had been identified at Blizzards Yard, Chalfont St Giles. This kitchen would not just provide assistance for covid-19 pandemic but would help with longer term problems such as food poverty.

- Aylesbury Vineyard is an established foodbank. During the first lockdown demand for food doubled at the foodbank, to help feed those in need within the community they used part of the councillor crisis fund to buy a large commercial freezer. This enabled them to reduce food waste as they could freeze produce before it spoiled, some of the money was used on microwavable take away dishes. They were able to produce and freeze nearly 5000 nutritious ready meals for clients. Part of the funding would have also helped with the running cost of the van that collects waste food from supermarkets everyday.
- Linking in with a number of foodbanks were Street Heroes; One Can Trust has 120 street heroes in High Wycombe who help collect food.
- It was important to connect foodbanks in urban areas to rural communities. The Bernwode Bus team decided that they wanted to do something positive with Bernie during lock down. They decided to decorate Bernie, fit a DJ system and travel to over 25 villages playing music, the team dressed up and collected food for food banks. To date they have collected over 2000 crates of food and £13,000 which they have donated to food banks and animal Charities locally.
- The councillors who won the LGIU Collaborating Working award worked with a local catering company and a number of volunteers to transport and hand deliver 130 hot curries to staff at Stoke Mandeville Hospital, Aylesbury Police Station and fire station. They then delivered 400 meals every week to the homeless and Aylesbury vineyard foodbank and continue to deliver to frontline emergency staff.

## Recommendation Seven – The Council needs to focus resource towards reducing loneliness and social isolation by:-

- A. Continuing to set up foundation services that provide the first steps in finding individuals who are experiencing loneliness, supported by structural enablers
- B. Continuing to direct interventions focussed on helping people maintain existing relationships and develop new ones e.g. promoting support activities such as lunch clubs, befriending schemes (which can be found in the directory of services which has been produced)
- C. Providing gateway services like transport, technology, spatial planning and housing which make it easier for communities to come together.

7A. Continuing to set up foundation services that provide the first steps in finding individuals who are experiencing loneliness, supported by structural enablers

### Evidence

The Local Government Association and Association of Directors of Public Health have produced a document with practical advice to lead the local response to the loneliness and social isolation issues arising from the pandemic. Intervening early to tackle loneliness and social isolation during the COVID-19 outbreak and beyond will help to prevent more costly health and care needs from developing, as well as aiding community resilience and recovery. This can only be done at the local level through partnerships between the council, voluntary and community sector, councillors, Primary Care Networks and relevant others. The impact on wellbeing from people at risk of loneliness is likely to be compounded by other economic and social impacts experienced by the same people, such as those experiencing job losses and health anxieties.

The structure is already there in Buckinghamshire and there are new exciting projects to help build stronger communities but it is important that enough resource is given to promoting groups such as Street Associations to find individuals that need help and then enough resource to help small community groups provide lunch clubs etc. A Community Board Chairman stated that all of us needed to be less reserved and knock on doors.

7B. Continuing to direct interventions focussed on helping people maintain existing relationships and develop new ones e.g. promoting support activities such as lunch clubs, befriending schemes (which can be found in the directory of services which has been produced)

### Evidence

The Inquiry Group heard some amazing stories of local initiatives who had benefitted from the Councillor Crisis Fund and who continued to promote support activities :-

- The Clare Foundation worked with Age UK Bucks and Bucks Older Persons Action Group to deliver a pilot project to provide smartphones with a 6 month prepaid SIM card to 50 isolated, older adults across Buckinghamshire. This was in partnership with the Winslow Rotary Club and the Bring Joy Foundation. <https://thclarefoundation.org/new-partnership-with-your-simpal/>
- Winslow Big Society – the Councillor Crisis Fund helped with providing food. However little funding is required to help people with anxiety. The Directory has helped with knowing people who have influence or how to signpost services. The Group is helping people home from hospital, so that hospital beds can be released. They have made 40/50 befriending calls and are encouraging local groups to run their own. This Group provides stability in the local community and provides lunch and walking clubs. The representative commented that £500 goes along way with small community groups. They have also brought equipment such as thermometers which they share with another charity. The Community Group has developed good networks and referral systems.

- Lindengate have been providing a rest and reflect programme for NHS/key workers and those who are bereaved.
- Space Aylesbury provide support and care to adults in Aylesbury Vale who are going through difficult times and the need for longer term input continues to display itself, particularly addressing the high level of stress and anxiety.
- Loneliness day is held on a Sunday. Amersham Rotate hosts a coffee morning where anyone is isolated can join. Other activities are provided such as exercise information. Silver Sunday (held once a year) has been an amazing initiative that has morphed into a number of other activities and sub groups to help social isolation.
- The Local Support Hub carry out befriending calls for those self-isolating and you can email the local support hub mailbox if you want to link anyone up to this service.
- Restore Hope have done a wonderful job with their toy and food boxes etc but their remit is limited to families. They have noted a growing issue around support for single parent families who are struggling during the pandemic.
- Better Connected Beaconsfield commented that by having volunteers supporting people in need that are matched with people living close by, it has created more positive connections, friendships and support that will continue for years to come.

7C. Providing gateway services like transport, technology, spatial planning and housing which make it easier for communities to come together.

### Evidence

The Council's Planning Department will consider 'place shaping' in any new development and this can be seen in the design for Aylesbury Garden Town. This will include new transport links, infrastructure and new garden communities, connected to existing neighbourhoods through good, innovate design. Rob Butler MP for Aylesbury commented on this project saying "there is a passionate ambition to become a real community and commercial hub, where people want to live, work, visit and invest".

"Councils have a key role to play in this, because they own most of the assets where community action could or should take place, such as parks, libraries and schools, with councillors creating the localised neighbourhood partnerships to deal with a range of mental and physical health issues. Councils are also responsible for public health, adult social care and children and young people's services. All of these services have a significant impact on tackling loneliness at a local level. The pandemic has also highlighted the importance of community volunteering in addressing loneliness.

<https://local.gov.uk/loneliness-social-isolation-and-covid-19>

APPENDIX ONE

FUNDING PROVISION SUMMARY

**Total Distributed** (w/b 16 March 2020 – w/b 4 January 2021): £1,765,851 (404 grants – 334 grantees)

**Average grant size:** £4,700 **Smallest grant:** £114 **Largest grant:** £73,000

**Funders:**

- **Bucks Council** - £224,769 (146 grants)
- **Heart of Bucks, Local** - £293,549 (49 grants)
- **Heart of Bucks, NET** - £443,219 (94 grants)
- **Rothschild Foundation** - £492,900 (22 grants)
- **Leap** - £335,252 (84 grants)
- **The Clare Foundation** - £109,120 (9 grants)

**The National Lottery Community Fund: Emergency Covid-19 Response Funding**

Total funding distributed March – September 2020: £1,287,779 (53 grants).

37 grants awarded under £10k, 16 grants awarded over £10k.

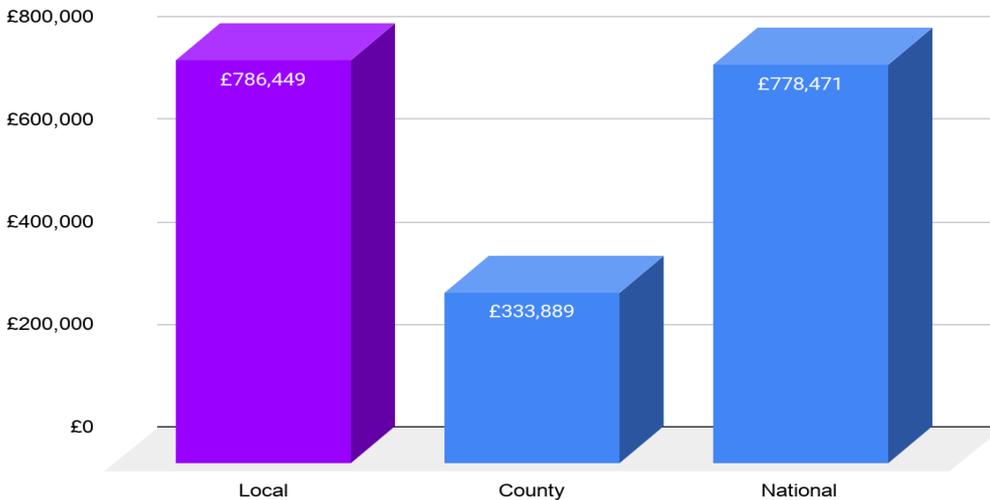
Funding was awarded across a number of thematic areas including: BAME, long term health conditions, MH, disability/SEND, community/volunteering, social isolation/befriending and community radio.

Significant increase in applications from Buckinghamshire and a high proportion of organisations that were awarded emergency funding had not previously applied for/received Reaching Communities funding.

External Delegation Agreement with Buckinghamshire Community Foundation for small grant funding (up to £10k grants, over 6 months) to be distributed from December to March 21 as part of the Coronavirus Stabilisation Fund.

Roughly dividing up the grants for the councillor crisis fund at the end of the first lockdown 83 grants (£132,177) were spent on food, 6 grants (£7,130) were spent on mental health and 57 grants (£79,162) were spent on general running costs, transport, information, technology and PPE.

Funding allocated to a specific category of need and geographical area



## APPENDIX TWO – THANK YOU TO THOSE WHO PROVIDED EVIDENCE

Strategic Funding Group as detailed in Recommendation Two  
Gareth Williams (Cabinet Member) and Claire Hawkes  
Katie Higginson Chief Executive of Community Impact Bucks

### Community Board Chairmen

Arif Hussain – Chairman of HW community Board  
David Anthony – Chairman of Beeches CB  
Anne Wight – Chairman Wing and Ivinghoe CB  
Susan Renshall – Chairman of Winslow and Villages CB  
Mark Winn – Chairman of Aylesbury CB  
Santokh Chokkar – Chairman of Denham Chalfonts and Gerrards Cross  
Michael Rand – Chairman of Haddenham and Waddesdon CB  
Graham Harris - Amersham

### Birmingham representatives

Susannah Wilson – Research and Evaluation Lead Birmingham Voluntary Service Council (BVSC)  
Benita Wishart – BVSC Support and Development Manager Prevention First (Neighbourhood Network Scheme)  
Matthew Bick, Senior Commissioning Officer from Birmingham City Council’s Prevention and Communities Team

### Lancashire representatives

Lynne Johnstone – Policy Information and Commissioning Lancashire County Council and Fiona Cruchley

### Food Community Groups

Emma Denley – Localism Manager (Local Support Hubs)  
Hannah Tomlin – Support Hub Food Lead  
Arif Hussain – Wycombe Councillor (supported several community grant schemes)  
Adam Townsend – Aylesbury Vineyard (was unable to attend but Adam was contacted by phone)  
Sue Severn - Berryfield Parish Council (Anthea Cass her Deputy may also attend)  
Susan Stone – Gerrards Cross Community Kitchen  
Joanna Anderson – St Laurence Food Cupboard  
Peter Johnson – Princes Risborough Community Bus and Risborough Basket  
Andy Ford – One Can Trust  
Veronica Corben – Winslow Big Society  
Keith Croxton – Buckingham Food Bank  
Alison Greenhalgh – Restore Hope Chesham

### Other community groups

Alasdair Turner – High Wycombe Citizen’s Advice Bureau  
Emma Burgham – Chiltern Citizen’s Advice Bureau  
Wendy Gray – Road Farm Countryways, Great Missenden  
Chris Brown - Hilltop Villages Community Volunteers Group and Cllr Patricia Birchley  
Sarah Jones – Chairman of Lighthouse Marlow  
Chris and Ness Hill – Lighthouse Marlow  
Patricia Reading - Marlow FM  
Charlie Powell – Lindengate  
Christopher Trower – Wendover Dementia Group  
Phil Thomas – Wycombe Rent  
Nicky Pearson – Kings Church High Wycombe  
Sauj Pandhak – Seeability  
Kate Lawton – Project Co-ordinator Space Aylesbury  
Jeannette Buckle – Trustee Better Connected Beaconsfield  
Paul Graham – Iver and District Countryside Association  
Alice Connor – The Theatre Shed  
Hilda Stern – Hughenden Street Association

APPENDIX THREE – FEEDBACK ON COMMUNITY GROUP QUESTIONNAIRE

NB: Under option 1-5 – 5 is good

**6: What made you think of doing the project?**

Option	Total	Percent
Builds on/extends what we already do	32	66.67%
Our members/clients/local community asked us to	14	29.17%
We could see a need/gap in what was on offer	26	54.17%
Research/feedback showed it was needed	10	20.83%
Just wanted to help	16	33.33%
Reaction to an issue/incident	24	50.00%
Other	1	2.08%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

7: Do you feel your project delivered value for money?	Total	Percent
Option		
1	0	0.00%
2	0	0.00%
3	3	6.25%
4	13	27.08%
5	32	66.67%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

**8: How successful was the project in meeting the needs you wanted to address?**

Option	Total	Percent
1	0	0.00%
2	0	0.00%
3	3	6.25%
4	20	41.67%
5	25	52.08%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

**9: Have any related needs arisen that the project did not address?**

Option	Total	Percent
Yes	21	43.75%
No	20	41.67%
Not sure	7	14.58%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

**10: Was the help or service provided by the project duplicated anywhere?**

Option	Total	Percent
Yes	9	18.75%
No	31	64.58%
Not sure	8	16.67%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

## 12: How effective did you find communications and advertising about the fund?

Option	Total	Percent
1	1	2.08%
2	5	10.42%
3	14	29.17%
4	12	25.00%
5	16	33.33%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

## 13: How would you rate the overall success of the Councillor Crisis Fund project?

Option	Total	Percent
1	0	0.00%
2	0	0.00%
3	4	8.33%
4	13	27.08%
5	31	64.58%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

Comments were welcomed as part of the questionnaire

*"We are extremely appreciative of the funding"*

*"It was unusual having the application put forward on our behalf"*

*"More widespread publicity for what you are offering...not sure how much about it was on social media"*

*"The process should have been open for charities to apply directly, rather than through local councillors as initially this slowed the application process"*

*"There was a lack of consistency across Community Boards... the requirements for eligibility and the process of allocation were not interpreted in the same way by different boards"*

*"...at a time when the sector was working incredibly hard to undertake organisational and structural change, and mindful of the amounts of funding being offered, a lighter touch process would have been helpful"*

*"More flexibility in how the funding could be spent"*

*"...could provide a technological solution to show solutions/contacts who could help with different problems"*

*"...could have included examples of what to claim for / templates of applications"*

*"At the end of August, the local authority withdrew Covid funding support with 10 days' notice which meant running on a shortfall from September"*

*"...it would be extremely interesting to see a report on the geographic breakdown, the sector breakdown, and the size of the organisations supported for the funds awarded"*

*"We would love to have showcased our improvements to the senior members of Bucks Council. Maybe an opportunity for the future?"*

FEEDBACK ON MEMBER QUESTIONNAIRE

NB: Under option 1-5 – 5 is good

**2: How easy or hard did you find the process?**

Option	Total	Percent
Very easy	11	52.38%
Moderately easy	5	23.81%
OK	4	19.05%
Moderately hard	0	0.00%
Very hard	0	0.00%
Not Answered	1	4.76%

**3: Were payments made quickly?**

Option	Total	Percent
Yes	18	85.71%
No	0	0.00%
Not sure	3	14.29%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

**4: Were any of your projects refused?**

Option	Total	Percent
Yes	8	38.10%
No	11	52.38%
Not sure	2	9.52%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

**5: Overall do you feel your project(s) delivered value for money?**

Option	Total	Percent
1	6	28.57%
2	1	4.76%
3	1	4.76%
4	5	23.81%
5	8	38.10%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

**6: How successful was the project in meeting the needs you wanted to address?**

Option	Total	Percent
1	1	4.76%
2	1	4.76%
3	2	9.52%
4	7	33.33%
5	9	42.86%
Not Answered	1	4.76%

7: Have you seen any other benefits for residents or the local community?	Total	Percent
Option		

Yes	17	80.95%
No	2	9.52%
Not sure	2	9.52%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

**8: Are there any other related needs that have arisen that the grant did not address?**

Option	Total	Percent
Yes	6	28.57%
No	6	28.57%
Not sure	9	42.86%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

**9: Was there any duplication of service elsewhere?**

Option	Total	Percent
Yes	3	14.29%
No	11	52.38%
Maybe	7	33.33%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

**10: Thinking about the Councillor Crisis Fund. Is there anything we could have done differently?**

Option	Total	Percent
Yes	7	33.33%
No	8	38.10%
Not sure	6	28.57%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

**11: How effective was the communication in advertising the fund?**

Option	Total	Percent
1	2	9.52%
2	1	4.76%
3	3	14.29%
4	10	47.62%
5	5	23.81%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

**12: How would you score the overall success of the Councillor Crisis Fund project?**

Option	Total	Percent
1	2	9.52%
2	2	9.52%
3	1	4.76%
4	9	42.86%
5	7	33.33%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

Summary of comments made:-

*"A big improvement in the sense of community"*

*"It has increased awareness that it is possible to get together to volunteer and make a real difference"*

*"Overall a big success"*

*“it would be good to follow up on the projects that funding was passed to”*

*“The money got to the people on the ground quickly”*

*“Concern about organisations applying for funding across Community Boards”*

*“... there is a high risk of some organisations making an application when the money or the project are not urgently needed... the bar for eligibility should be set high”*

*“Essential medicines and food supplies allowed vulnerable to isolate and shield”*

*“The process could sometimes be slow and some of the funding could have been better spent elsewhere”*

*“...the team were brilliant”*

*“I found the forms easy. Officers were proactive and help was immense, they were always available on the end of the phone and responded to emails quickly and efficiently”*

*“Local residents helped people of different faiths and cultures work together in a positive way to build new relationships and volunteer together for the good of local people”*

*“The hubs and volunteer groups really made a difference to those residents and some of the projects”*

*“...the community spirit will be beneficial in the longer term, and we will continue to promote this via our community boards”*

*“Funding was made to a number of pop up food banks that competed with established food banks for excess fresh produce from supermarkets... it is difficult to justify the use of public money sent to those organisations”*

*“More checks should have been carried out... some groups had budgets for certain equipment already”*

*“The forms were easy to complete”*

*“...one criticism was that there was no feedback from the group(s) receiving the grants to know if they were effective and achieved their aim”*

*“...confidence in Councillors delivering a service quickly and understanding the needs of our residents”*

*“...it was clear where and when the money was being used”*

*“Communication of the fund was good”*