



Cambridge City Community Response

Ward Cluster Network What Happens Next?

‘Keep it simple – keep it agile. React to the requests and build the service your community needs’

CCVS

July 2021

Preface added July 2022

Contents

1	Preface	3
2	Executive summary	3
2.1	Introduction	3
2.2	Key findings	3
2.3	Recommendations	4
	Improving signposting to existing services	4
	Support for local communications.....	5
3	Introduction.....	6
3.1	Background	6
3.2	Methodology.....	7
3.3	Research limitations.....	7
4	Ward group experience of managing and delivering support	8
4.1	Putting support in place in the first lockdown.....	8
4.1.1	Mutual aid ethos	8
4.1.2	Ward groups formed by pre-existing organisations	9
4.2	What groups did.....	10
4.3	Methods of delivery	14
4.4	Importance of communication	17
4.5	Volunteering	17
4.6	Challenges for groups	20
4.6.1	Guidance needed sooner	20
4.6.2	Communication with Cambridge City Council	21
4.6.3	Complex cases.....	21
4.6.4	Stigma around seeking help.....	21
4.6.5	Need for volunteer management	22
4.6.6	Burn out	22
4.6.7	Prejudice towards faith groups.....	23
5	What advice would the ward groups give to others.....	23
5.1	Give things a try	23
5.2	Prioritise communication and get to grips with IT.....	23
5.3	Be realistic and flexible	24
5.4	Put in place seed funding.....	24
5.5	Collaborate and leave space for others to help.....	24
5.6	Create more opportunities for collaboration and partnership between statutory and voluntary sector.	24

6	Ward group's longer-term plans.....	25
6.1	New rules of engagement for pre-existing groups	25
6.2	Status of new groups	27
6.3	Importance of continued cross ward collaboration	28
7	Conclusions.....	29
7.1	One size does not fit all.....	29
7.2	The value of pre-existing relationships	29
7.3	Creating a successful partnership between the community and City Council	29
7.4	Getting the right communication tools in place	30
7.5	Setting up and running local emergency volunteer taskforces	30
7.6	Getting essential guidance in place	31
7.7	Exposing inequalities to a wider audience.....	31
7.8	Business support for the community.....	31
7.9	Ward Cluster Network legacy	31
8	Recommendations	32
8.1	Build on local authority investment in social capital	32
8.2	Build on cross-ward cooperation	32
8.3	Create a repository of useful guidance for the future	32
8.4	Improve signposting to existing services	32
8.5	Support for local communications.....	33
8.6	Improve access to volunteering.....	33
8.7	Improved engagement with business.....	33
8.8	Focus on improving digital inclusion.....	33
8.9	Recognise what has been achieved	34
9	Appendices	35
9.1	Appendix one: list of research participants	35
9.2	Appendix two: case studies	36
9.2.1	A Coordinator's Story – West Chesterton Mutual Aid.....	36
9.2.2	Putting food on the table – Arbury Community Fridge	37
9.2.3	From visitor to volunteer! Queen Edith's Community Forum	38
9.2.4	Supplying ethnically diverse food - Karim Foundation and Cambridge Community Ethnic Forum	38

1 Preface

This report has been a while coming as partners have grappled with new and ongoing issues. Whilst both CCVS and the City Council have learnt from this research we wanted to release it more widely as a contribution to the understanding of how the voluntary sector played a vital role in helping communities throughout the pandemic. There is a lot for us to learn, a lot to build on, and a lot that needs doing to make sure that communities and community groups are front and centre of how we move forward to make Cambridge a fairer and more pleasant place to live. **Mark Freeman CEO Cambridge CVS**

It's been over two years since the start of the coronavirus pandemic in UK. Two years on, it has been good to look back at the early learning that took place and reflect on what was achieved within a very short space of time. Our thanks go to CCVS and all the community partners that took part in the research. Cambridge really came together to support our communities through what became a very difficult and hectic few years. Since the early research at the end of year one, we've learnt a lot and I'm pleased with the partnerships that have been forged. I look forward to continuing our work with communities and voluntary sector partners to tackle the challenges ahead. **Vicky Haywood Community Development Manager, Cambridge City Council**

2 Executive summary

2.1 Introduction

Representatives from groups involved in delivering emergency support from each of the 14 wards were invited to participate in the Ward Cluster Network (WCN) by the City Council early in the first lockdown in Spring 2020. The network created a gateway for communication, collaboration, learning and support. It initially met weekly online, and these meetings were supplemented by emailed updates.

As part of a wider community group recovery plan, CCVS were asked to interview members from each of the 14 City ward groups in the WCN, together with other contributing groups or individuals identified by the ward participants. The intention is to capture the key lessons that could influence any future emergency response but also to build on the positives such as increased community spirit and partnerships to support communities moving forward into a recovery phase.

CCVS undertook structured online interviews with 30 participants from 26 organisations. Most of the interviews took place in June 2021.

2.2 Key findings

A diversity of approach -The ward groups are a mix of spontaneous mutual aid style groups, new groups facilitated by local councillors to deliver emergency support and pre-existing groups collaborating with other community stakeholders, particularly faith groups. All the groups were supported by a City Council community officer and were given online guidance and £1000 to help them meet essential costs.

What the groups did – All the ward groups offered to pick up and deliver shopping and prescriptions to people who were shielding or isolating. A number were also involved in running food hubs and other initiatives to support those who were socially isolated.

A wave of volunteers – During the first lockdown most of the ward groups attracted more volunteers than they had tasks to allocate. Volunteering tapped into people's desire to help their

neighbours; people wanted to be part of something momentous. As the pandemic progressed numbers of active volunteers reduced and the needs of the people requesting help became more complex. More recently many people reengaged by offering to help at vaccination centres, but this activity has now mostly wound down.

For most of the ward groups a combination of volunteer coordinators and paid community/faith group workers provided the necessary support and guidance for the sustained volunteering effort. Red tape was minimised, and groups operated on mutual trust. The sense from the ward volunteer coordinators was that many volunteers had not volunteered before, had time to give and were attracted by how easy it was to offer help and the hyperlocal, flexible, and informal opportunities on offer. The direct interactions with beneficiaries meant that volunteers got instant feedback and could readily see the value of what they were doing.

Communication was key – Effective communication within the wards was crucial in both managing the requests for help and the volunteers but also in helping to disseminate key information to the local community. Several of the wards were able to capitalise on pre-existing lists of data for people already in receipt of community newsletters or emails.

Getting essential guidance in place – Initially there was a lack of focussed information particularly around data protection, pharmacy protocols, risk assessments, money handling and volunteer protocols. The groups also had trouble identifying other sources of help and support for people because of the lack of any up-to-date directory of services.

Exposing inequalities to a wider audience – In most wards, volunteers identified issues around food and fuel poverty, disability, and mental ill-health. It became apparent to the ward groups very early on that whilst the crisis exacerbated these issues many were pre-existing. There is also concern about how to address the stigma some people feel around seeking help. Some minority ethnic communities faced disproportionate health risks from Covid with a high percentage in key worker roles facing even great risk. Ethnic minority groups were also more likely to work in activities badly effected by lockdown and therefore struggled financially. Cultural and language barriers added to people's sense of social isolation and difficulties obtaining help and support. Including difficulties obtaining culturally appropriate food from food banks and food hubs.

2.3 Recommendations

Build on local authority investment in social capital

- Continue to invest in building partnerships and networks with the local voluntary sector.
- Continue to support the work of the food hubs for as long as they are required and support these organisations to source and provide culturally appropriate food for all clients.
- Create seed funding pots under local community control to get new ideas underway.

Build on cross-ward cooperation

- Establish a ward group digital forum where groups can share and develop ideas.
- Run occasional network meetings around key topics of interest to maintain connections.

Create a repository of useful guidance for the future

- A toolbox of the detailed guidance, protocols, and policies for use in any future emergency.

Improving signposting to existing services

- There is a need to investigate ways to support effective signposting that is sustainable.¹

Support for local communications

- Develop a community newsletter for each ward. Some support and funding will be needed to help initiate these new communications.

Improve the volunteering offer

- Develop opportunities that meet volunteer needs.
- Create up to date, responsive online brokerage that allows those looking to volunteer a quick and efficient way to find and apply for local opportunities.
- Continue to offer support for those who face obstacles in engaging with volunteering.

Improved engagement with business

- Create digital resources including an online brokerage aimed at business to support their understanding of the needs of the sector. For more recommendations around connecting VCS and business, see [CCVS report \(2019\)](#)

Focus on improving digital inclusion

- Issues around digital inequality have highlighted the need for ongoing action to give everyone access to equal access to information, support and opportunity.

Recognise what has been achieved

- Consider creating a broader recognition of what has been experienced and achieved. The purpose of any recognition event would be to demonstrate the continued value placed on neighbourhood support

¹ There could be a role for <https://www.haycambridge.co.uk/>

3 Introduction

3.1 Background

In response to the announcement of the first lockdown in Spring 2020 Cambridge City Council engaged with individuals, local councillors, existing community organisations, charities, and faith groups in the 14 City wards. The Council identified lead participants in each ward to create a Ward Cluster Network (WCN). The network was run by Council officers and led initially by Debbie Kaye and then Vicky Haywood with support from other colleagues. The County Council was also represented as were relevant local organisations including Care Network Cambridgeshire, Tempo and CCVS. The network created a conduit for communication, collaboration, learning and support, it initially met weekly online, and these meetings were supplemented by emailed updates.

As part of a wider community group recovery plan CCVS were asked to interview members from each of the 14 City ward groups in the WCN together with other contributing groups or individuals identified by the ward participants. The intention is to capture the key lessons that could influence any future emergency response but also to build on the positives such as increased community spirit and partnerships to support communities moving forward into a recovery phase. The responses where necessary will be anonymised.

This work follows on from an interim study, undertaken after the 1st lockdown [Cambridge Community & Cambridge City Community Services Team's Shared Response to Covid-19: Capturing learning from the work of the ward cluster network and looking forwards](#). Compiled by Liz Hughes (Sept 2020). This report gives a clear and succinct outline of what took place in the early stages of the Pandemic (March to July 2020) and about the evolution of the Ward Cluster Network. The key findings from this research on looking forward were:

- Not all the WCN groups plan to continue operating beyond the emergency response, while others have ambitions to expand their activities in the longer term.
- There is interest in continuing the WCN's shared support and learning
- Groups identified common ongoing challenges around financial hardship, mental health and wellbeing, social isolation, and loneliness.
- There is hope that the City Council can engage with local groups as equal partners in helping deliver local solutions.

This new *What Happens Next?* Research is building on these findings; this research gives an indication of the work that has taken place between March 2020 and June 2021 as reported by people in the ward groups and is not intended to reflect the full breadth of the effort undertaken informally and via other established organisations in Cambridge.

For a broader view of what was going on across the County (March to Sept 2020) see [Covid Report Card for Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Charities and Community Groups](#)

For a full picture of what was going on in the City around the Covid-19 emergency food response (April 2020 to Mar 2021) see the Cambridge Sustainable Food Report – [Cambridge a Community at Work](#)

There is also a lot of research activity taking place nationally around grass roots activism during the Pandemic and its future role in recovery. This [NCVO blog](#) summarises some of the work that has already taken place and work that is ongoing

3.2 Methodology

CCVS undertook structured online interviews with 30 participants from 26 organisations, 9 of which were new groups set up in response to Covid and 17 were mostly partnerships between existing community and faith groups. Most of the interviews took place in June 2021. The purpose of the research was:

- To capture the key learning and ideas the participants could share from working in their community over the last year.
- To get their thoughts on how things could look in the future for their group or volunteering in their community.
- To help inform the conversation statutory agencies are having about supporting recovery in their community.

Each respondent was asked the following questions:

1. Looking at your experience of managing and delivering support to your local community what was most successful in your opinion? And if different, of what are you most proud?
2. Conversely, what did you find particularly challenging? What would have helped you better address these challenges?
3. If you were asked to advise someone facing the same situation you faced last year, what key advice would you give?
4. In the longer term does your group plan to continue to work in the local community?

Yes – Do you plan to continue what changes do you envisage to the way the group operates?

No – If your group does not plan to continue do you think there is a way of building on the work that the group and community has done moving forwards?

Most interviews were undertaken via video link, a few by phone and a small number submitted their responses via email. A list of those interviewed is shown in appendix one.

3.3 Research limitations

This research is qualitative and dependent on the information shared by participants. Although we have tried to ensure we have accurately recorded and shared the information given to us there are inevitably gaps in some of the detail. However, we believe the research does accurately convey the nature of the community response. The participants were selected from the City Ward Cluster Network or from among their connections. The Ward Cluster Network members were invited to represent their ward by the City Council, to keep the group to a manageable size. The groups were then asked to cascade the information shared at the network meetings and supported in their work by the Council team and by an initial grant of £1000. A few participants mentioned that some other groups active in their community had felt ‘alienated’ because they were not invited to attend the network – where contact details for these groups were passed on to CCVS contact was made and an interview offered.

This research was initially commissioned in March 2021 when there was an expectation Covid support was winding down, there was then a delay caused by local elections held in May 2021 and it was June before the research was able to commence. Around the same time the Delta variant of the coronavirus became an issue of concern and there was a huge effort to vaccinate the adult population. As a result of this continued uncertainty some of the ward groups went ‘into a holding pattern’ and when we spoke to them had yet to decide what to do next.

The measure of how successful the ward groups were is based on their own reports of their ability to meet the emergency needs of their communities. However, there is a need for caution as this does not consider the needs of hidden groups who may have been unable or unwilling to access the help on offer.

4 Ward group experience of managing and delivering support

4.1 Putting support in place in the first lockdown

Cambridge City Council reached out late March/ early April 2020 to create the Ward Cluster Network (WCN) making resources and funding available to support community groups so they could provide the essential support people in their communities needed to stay at home.

The speed of response from the City Council was identified as key to their success by most of the groups. The quality of the support from individual City officers was invaluable. Particularly when dealing with more complex cases. Ward groups were also very grateful for the £1000 'seed funding' which allowed them to obtain insurance, necessary pieces of equipment and emergency supplies for those in need.

'We weren't left floundering around on our own but got plugged into a City wide network'

'Vicky was fantastic and shared useful support around PPE and obtaining food'

'The City Council were amazing calm and measured they did a really good job of coordinating things'

'The hub meetings were very beneficial – it was knowledge on tap.'

4.1.1 Mutual aid ethos²

There were an estimated 4,300 mutual aid groups set up in the UK in March/April 2020

The characteristics of mutual aid groups formed during the COVID-19 pandemic are that they:

- Appeal to people's desire to help others in a crisis;
- Raise awareness of the people who are ill, short of basic necessities, elderly, and/or vulnerable;
- Run on an entirely voluntary basis.

The Covid-19 Mutual Aid Groups Map³ shows 14 new groups set up as mutual aid/Covid help groups in Cambridge City. In addition, there were unspecified numbers of street WhatsApp groups that sprung up that did not sign up to a network and therefore cannot be quantified. Five of the WCN groups were set up as mutual aid:

- Cambridge Market Ward Covid-19 Mutual Aid
- Petersfield Covid-19 response
- Romsey Mutual Aid
- East Chesterton Mutual Aid
- West Chesterton Mutual Aid

Cambridge Market Ward Covid-19 Mutual Aid set up as mutual aid using WhatsApp, leaflet drops and posters. Deliberately as self-run as possible – just neighbour to neighbour support. Not a

² Benton, E. and Power, A., 2021. [Community Responses to the Coronavirus Pandemic: How Mutual Aid Can Help](#). LSE Public Policy Review

³ <https://covidmutualaid.org/local-groups/>

‘proper group’ they did not want to be liable so avoided calling those offering help volunteers. The coordinators met up with ward councillors who signposted people to them. The local Wesley Church held their funding which they used for promotion and some small grants for groceries.

Petersfield Mutual Aid was formed out of street WhatsApp groups. Within a fortnight they had ward coverage and a coordinators group made up of four people who had not known each other before but had range of skills that worked well together.

‘It was random though who got involved, it might not have worked.’ Mike Davey.

Romsey Ward Mutual Aid Initially started as a WhatsApp group but that soon became a problem re data protection. They got great technical support from volunteers who allowed them to initially run a 24hour manned helpline – with calls being diverted to people’s mobiles – they were able to create a rota and the central mosque security people provided the night cover. As of June 2021, the group were still running the helpline.

West Chesterton Mutual Aid arose over the first weekend of lockdown in March 2020 from a community Face Book group and initially had a North Cambridge WhatsApp group but that became too unwieldy. Local councillors were helpful in getting things organised on a ward basis. They had a website but that did not cover the new housing developments so social media was important. The group decided the key was to set up a helpline as they felt people online would know how to access information and they wanted to *‘help people who fall through the cracks’*. They got leaflets out very quickly. The helpline was managed by a core group of five volunteers. They felt it was important that a person answered the phone. The group only recently moved on to using voicemail.

‘We had people ringing in a panic’

‘We had some desperate conversations in the first few months’

‘For lots of people we were filling in a gap.’

Stretton Avenue Group in West Chesterton Ward *‘In the first lockdown, we set up an email address on the street that people could contact if they were shielding and needed anything (We let people know about it by flyering all the houses). Interestingly, people seemed to ‘pair up’ with neighbours who could offer help and the email address wasn’t used for very long, which I think was a good thing’*

4.1.2 Ward groups formed by pre-existing organisations

Pre-existing organisations almost overnight pivoted from delivering their usual services to creating collaborations across communities to meet need. Residents Associations and Community Forums were already in existence with the benefit of bank accounts, committees, and supporters. Faith groups had trained staff, supporters and all the policies and bank accounts in place.

Abbey Ward Community Response Abbey People worked closely with Barnwell Baptist Church, Christ the Redeemer Church and Cambridge United Community Trust particularly on food provision.

Arbury Community Support the City Council approached Arbury Baptist Church, who used the church website, set up an email, liaised with local residents’ associations and sent out leaflets to local homes.

Castle Covid Support Association (CCSA) A resident’s association with a bank account was approached by the City Council to take on the role of ward lead. A local councillor was involved in finding people to get involved as was the Residents Association at Eddington. As a result of contact through early WCN meetings the group adopted the same constitution as Romsey Mutual Aid to

create a new organisation. Trustees included chairs of two residents' associations and the vicar at St Augustine.

Cherry Hinton Response The church team at St Andrews quickly collaborated with a local councillor, Cherry Hinton Community Benefit Society, Cherry Hinton Baptist church and Cherry Hinton Festival. The group used the bank account from the Benefit Society, insurance from Church and safeguarding guidance from Council.

Coleridge Community Action Set up by local councillors who reached out to an '*ad hoc group of people*' including the Vicar at St Martin's – there were about 6 people at the core of things.

Help in Kings Hedges the Vicar of the Church of the Good Shepherd headed up the Community Fridge. A volunteer coordinator headed up the 'Help at home' response.

North Newnham Community Support As one of the larger resident's associations in the ward they were approached by the City Council to be a ward lead. They had a committee, bank account and email list they could use to recruit volunteers and send out information. Newnham Croft Residents Association offered similar support in their area of South Newnham.

Queen Edith Community Forum has existed for 15 years and in the last 6 it has become more community activity focussed. They were able to use the '*reach and goodwill*' they had built up to deliver during Covid. Their response to the pandemic was a 3-way partnership with the Forum and local churches St James and St John.

Trumpington Volunteer Service (TVS) Set up in March 2020 and initially piggy backed on Trumpington Residents Association to bank donations being offered and claim gift aid. The TVS team included a local councillor, residents and the Vicar at St Mary & St Michaels' Church. It later became constituted and set up its own bank account.

4.2 What groups did

There were universal areas of need identified around access to food, medicine and essentials and social and emotional support. Those asking for help came from a diverse range of backgrounds including people who had never asked for help before. Most of the wards also sought to provide activities for families, especially while children were being educated at home.

Additionally, in most wards there were issues around food and fuel poverty and mental ill-health. It became apparent to the ward groups very early on that whilst the crisis exacerbated these issues many were pre-existing.

All the ward groups offered to pick up and deliver shopping and prescriptions to people who were shielding or isolating. For all the groups the first lockdown was the busiest time with some finding that by the second lockdown many people had made their own arrangements. Additional activities undertaken by groups are outlined below.

Abbey Ran a food hub in Barnwell Baptist Church for the first 9 months for 6 days a week. In addition to food from Fare Share the hub was one of 7 that benefited from vegetable donations from CoFarm – the Community Farm in Abbey. Abbey also delivered hot meals supported by Cambridge United Community Trust (CUCT) and local businesses Marshalls and the Pipasha restaurant. They got a Cambridgeshire Community Foundation grant for electronic tablets for children without access to a computer for home schooling and liaised with Cambridge Online who

sorted out data. They contacted schools and distributed art packs to their pupils. They also distributed Xmas hampers along with CUCT and local churches.

Abbey ward is the home of Cambridge United Community Trust (CUCT) although they are also active in Arbury and Trumpington and their Schools programme is more wide ranging. At the start of the pandemic the Trust focussed on food delivery and worked with Cambridge Sustainable Food. They cooked meals in their kitchens, some meals were also provided by the Pipasha restaurant and delivered to people in need– particularly single parent families and people shielding.

'It was brilliant everyone came together' Simon Wall CUCT Communities Manager

The Trust also supported seniors, who pre-Covid had attended their monthly lunch club and tea, (over 90 people) by checking in with them by phone and asking them what support they wanted. As a result, they arranged virtual afternoon teas and for those that could not get online they did 40 garden gate visits. They offered some technical training and worked with Cambridge Online to get more seniors engaged in the online tea. They also put together activity packs with quizzes and jigsaws, created fun activities like Bake Off and knitting challenges and got school kids to write letters to seniors. They have just started outdoor meet ups for seniors in the park. For families the communities manager, Simon Wall ran 100 fitness workouts from his conservatory streaming them on Face Book and is now back running their free outdoor bootcamp.

Abdul Hye, is proprietor of the Pipasha restaurant situated opposite Abbey Stadium, he also secretary of the Bangladeshi cultural and welfare association and a trustee of Cambridge Community Ethnic Forum. As well as providing hot meals alongside CUCT and donating food to food hubs the restaurant initiated a 'Fill you foodbank' campaign encouraging restaurants to ask their customers to 'donate a meal scheme' by adding £5 to their payment. The scheme now has over 60 participating restaurants nationally.

'Without our community we wouldn't be here, this is our way of giving back.' Abdul Hye

Arbury in addition to the general community support the Baptist Church also hosted the Cambridge Sustainable Food community lunches for the first part of the lockdown until they relocated to the larger, professional kitchens at Cambridge Regional College. *'We are very proud to be associated with them'*. Pastor Matt Rowe

The Shah-Jala Islamic Centre has been running a food hub in Darwin Drive once a week supported by the local Iman and volunteers. It offers food familiar to families from South East Asia but is open to anyone who needs it, currently helping around 30 families a week.

Coleridge worked with Cambridge Sustainable Food to set up a food hub based in St Thomas' Hall. They have 20 volunteers and 20-30 people coming each week for food – around 50% of visitors come from outside the area.

'Brilliant to be able to calm someone and offer help. It makes you feel good, but the volume of work was sometimes difficult.' Sue Dennis, Coleridge

Market The Mutual Aid group facilitated neighbour support with shopping and prescription collections via WhatsApp groups.. Also in Market Ward, Cambridge Community Kitchen came out of the Lockon collective, a squat in The Hopbine, a disused pub. The group decided to form a food collective to ensure no one went hungry. It started by sharing food via a community fridge and then evolved into a project that feeds over 100 people a night three times a week. Food can be collected

6-7pm (but they do not turn people away at other times) and they will deliver to those that need this service. They have a team of 12 active volunteers but probably have 200 on their books *'It is amazing how many people wanted to be involved.'* Food is donated from local shops, they have also used donations and fundraised to buy dry foods in bulk. By end of June 2021, they had produced nearly 10,000 meals for the community. Food is also being collected by the homeless.

Kings Hedges the Help at Home coordinator ran the helpline allocating tasks (at the peak 25 calls a week), she used volunteers known to the team for going to people's houses (but not inside) and invited volunteers not known to them to get involved with the food hub. For safeguarding reasons volunteers reported on tasks undertaken and they were discouraged from making private arrangements. Those needing more help were referred to a linked City Council officer. The coordinator was happy to offer people a chat when needed. The group also have a good relationship with local GP surgeries who referred into the helpline as well as North Cambridge Community Partnership who were good at picking up on people needing support.

'People were very scared and contact with another human was in short supply.' Ruth Bangor, Help at Home coordinator

The group had access to the vicar's discretionary fund from money raised and they made sure volunteers were not out of pocket – they did not take physical payments for shopping only online was available.

The vicar and two other coordinators ran the fridge *'We were flying by the seat of our pants'* Rev David Maher. It was helpful that the group had a track record of working with Cambridge Sustainable Food. The fridge is open three times a week mainly with food from local FareShare but they also purchase additional food – Cambridge Food Co provided fresh fruit and vegetables at cost price and delivered food. They also delivered community lunches which Cambridge Sustainable Food were producing in the Baptist Church and they used Turtle Doves van – they had a £5,000 local authority grant that made a huge difference.⁴

'By Sept we were on our knees and took a month off.' Dave Maher, Vicar

North Cambridge Community Partnership (NCCP) based in Arbury ward and also operates in Kings Hedges ward. Although their buildings at Nuns Way and Lawrence Way were closed March to September 2020, they remained active in the community throughout. They ran a project making PPE to support local care homes and the Arbury community fridge. They delivered items to 200 homes. They were awarded a Cambridge Community Foundation grant to deliver 600 packs to households over the summer. 'Cook it! Craft it! Involved cooking packs for kids to get involved in food preparation and crafts. They also delivered science magazines, lego and gardening club materials. Xmas hampers were delivered to 72 seniors and young families. They are still delivering parcels to families.

NCCP also ran a virtual toddler group, online network meetings for groups 'meet and eat' working in the community and their kids coding club. They kept in touch with their crochet club of older ladies (which had met pre pandemic) as they were not able to meet online, they sent them materials and engaged them in becoming pen pals with local school children. *'One lady didn't leave her house for 6 months'*.

⁴ Arbury Community Fridge is featured as a case study in appendix 2 of this report (pt 8.1.2)

Newnham in addition to offering residents support there was a weekly collection made for the Food Banks run in other wards. Similar collections were also made in Castle and Queen Edith wards.

Romsey In addition to offering shopping and prescription collection, befriending and dog walking they also provided a translation support for doctor visits for the older Italian population in the ward. The Food hub in Romsey was run by the Edge Café and Cambridge Sustainable Food. C3 church also helped with food with their Love your neighbour shop.

Romsey Mill continued to operate throughout in some form and provided safeguarding support both for Romsey and Petersfield wards. Schools and Cambridge Online provided kit and data with Romsey Mill repurposing some kit so their clients could get online. They felt they acted as a bridge between the community response and their projects. The Pre School remained open, and they were able to point families to ward support. Support for young parents continued online including antenatal care and online home visits. Youth development work picked up after Government reprioritised this after 1st lockdown. The Aspire programme working with autistic young people successfully kept most of their clients engaged by running online socials.

Cambridge Central Mosque based in Romsey as well as supporting Romsey Mutual Aid's 24 hour helpline at night, also ran its own helpline and supported people with shopping and essentials. One of their trustees explained that their mosque has a reputation for being a pillar of hope and strength and they had requests for help from outside Cambridge from people who did not want to ask for help in their own community – she gave an example of messages for aid being sent as private messages via Instagram.

Queen Edith Their two biggest projects were the food hub and volunteer scheme. These provided learning opportunities and a reason to be more ambitious.

'We pushed the boundaries of what we thought we could do.' Sam Davies

The food hub was run by 80 volunteers and £30,000 was raised to support it – a lot of older volunteers were shielding but wanted to contribute in a way that was *'meaningful and positive'* On average the food hub helped 45 families a week.

St James' church focussed on food insecurity and housed the hub with the curate/vicar helping run it. They benefited from the Forum's skill with collecting data and with communication. Queen Edith ward did not have a pre-existing community food fridge or food bank and started a little later than some so missed out on links with large supermarkets. But they did get FareShare deliveries which they supplemented through donations of food and money. They also had vegetables delivered from CoFarm, Cambridge's community farm.

The group also created activity packs for 120 pupils on pupil premium – asking local schools what was needed including materials from the Scrapstore and Cambridge Childrens' & Young People's services (Chypps) also donated craft items. The church manned a family table at the food hub with donated books, games etc children could take.

'I felt we built trust being there every week' Anne Strauss, curate

The Church also ran a pumpkin picnic in October, arranged giveaways at Xmas and Valentine's day – creating packs to make felt hearts that people could give to others *'to make them feel cared for'*

The Forum produced a summer activities booklet and organised sports and recreation for children at the Nightingale Road recreation ground. Parents were grateful to be able to get their kids out in a

managed safe way. Prior experience meant they could get the funding; the trainers and they had the visibility.

'Its been incredible. We did our very best' Sam Davies

In January 2021 the Forum were approached by Cambridge City 4 Primary Care Network to supply volunteers at the Cornford House Surgery local vaccination centre. This ran for 21 weeks and the community input was a huge success. [There's a summary report here](#). The NHS team remarked on the slick volunteer organisation, which was built on the 'keep it simple' IT approach learned by the Queen Edith's Community Forum during the pandemic. This was based on Google Forms, Google Sheets and Mailchimp, and meant that potential volunteers were emailed out a form before each vaccination session, *which had their name and details already filled in*, so that all they had to do was tick a session and click 'submit'. The NHS team could then consult a Google Sheet of volunteers which they could see being populated in real time.

'The Queen Edith's Community Forum was asked by the NHS if it would set up and manage a similar system for managing volunteers across the whole city, but we did not have the resources to offer more than advice. Volunteers have since offered help at regionally- and nationally-organised vaccination centres, particularly at Cherry Hinton, but have commented that the more formal signup and organisational arrangements at these are rather off-putting.' Chris Rand

Trumpington TVS had a helpline held by a volunteer who found that in addition to requests for help people rang for a chat, to get signposted to medical help (because they did not understand the official guidance) and because they had run out of money. They also had a website and email for people to request support.

During school closure the group provided family activity packs for primary school aged children and distributed these at Trumpington pavilion, Trumpington meadows and Brooklyn Ave. They also directed volunteers to Trumpington Food hub headed up by a local councillor and TVS helped source extra items such as nappies.

West Chesterton In addition to offering help with shopping, prescription pick up. Lifts to doctors' appointments and befriending calls they also looked for ways to support families.

We held the [animal trail \(and a subsequent easter trail\)](#) which we believe spread some fun around the community – we certainly had some good feedback from people who enjoyed it and I know those who displayed also felt the fun/enjoyment of the event Clara Todd

4.3 Methods of delivery

Abbey adopted the local WhatsApp Street groups, providing advice and insurance cover and they seconded their CHYPPs project worker to manage the 150 volunteers. They were already in the process of setting up a community fridge pre pandemic, so they were in a good position to benefit from donated food from school kitchens and restaurants forced to close in the 1st lockdown.

Leaflets went out to homes in the ward offering help and one of the volunteers managed the phone, she sent generalised requests for help to the appropriate WhatsApp group and then send the details to the volunteer. Any concerns were referred to the project worker. They were very busy in 1st lockdown, but it eased off, although some volunteers are still supporting people with shopping and they are looking into to how to transition people back to independence – particularly difficult with those in assisted living accommodation as not all care has returned.

Arbury A member of the congregation acted as coordinator and matched requests with local volunteers – she then left them to continue the arrangement as needed – all the volunteers had her personal email if required. They followed City Council guidance on volunteering. For example, they checked with people that they had permission to share their email with the volunteer. Ania Anderson at Akeman Street Centre was very supportive with advice.

Castle described by the group coordinator as a ward *‘with lots of professional talent and managerial experience’* By the end of April 2020 they had a constituted, insured, risk assessed organisation with all the necessary procedures in place including GDPR – it was huge amount of work in setting it up

‘It consumed me at first’ 6/7hrs a day 7 days a week’ Judith Perry

But once they set up an email and webpage which put automated systems in place the work load eased and it now takes 1-2 hours a week to monitor emails.

Apart from identifying possible volunteers they also sent out a leaflet and ended up with 115 volunteers at one stage – far more than needed for the 3-4 people requesting help each week.

In addition to 4 trustees, they have an administrative group with 12-15 people – 8 of whom were active. The steering group met as regularly as necessary everything was run *‘in a very exact professional way.’* We were careful to ensure we *‘satisfy scrutiny’*.

Cherry Hinton Church members created a **‘What will help’** website which they shared with groups in Kings Hedges, Castle and Fulbourn – people used the site to offer and ask for help. They also had a helpline manned by the church administrator.

Coleridge divided the area into three with one facilitator in each matching tasks to volunteers. A volunteer set up a phone line linked to an email and online data protection issues were addressed. There was also a website. The phone was a recorded helpline which was checked four times a day nominally on a rota, but it became apparent there were on two people with the capacity to check regularly enough. Initially offered dog walking, grocery shopping and prescriptions. The group had specific volunteers with photo ID who collected and delivered prescriptions. The helpline and email were wound up end of March 2021 as enquiries had dried up – volunteer data was deleted except for the food hub.

Kings Hedges was linked to the website questionnaire that Cherry Hinton developed *‘Will you help’* to gather information from volunteers. This collected skills/languages for example and included volunteer protocols.

Newnham North Newnham had an email address and phone number that people were invited to contact. There were relatively few requests that were easily handled.

It is worth noting that there were strong informal support networks already in existence and these continued to operate in a way that was integrated within the Covid support activities. Dai Davies

Market promoted an email which two people monitored, they then put tasks out to Street WhatsApp groups. They used addresses or postcodes to allocate work to WhatsApp groups each had around 15 to 20 people. At the busiest point they had around 30 requests a week which they considered very manageable. They felt that by the second wave people had made their own arrangements and they had very few requests. The group did not get involved in food provision or befriending.

'It was really gratifying even if just 30 people a week who'd have struggled were able to find help. We made it a little easier for people.' Sophia Cameron Christie

Petersfield The group used WhatsApp groups there was not a hierarchy, and it was neighbour helping neighbour. They recognised people wanted to talk around wider issues so set up a C19 chat WhatsApp group to keep the street groups purely around delivering covid support. Those who could not access WhatsApp groups could access email which was publicised through a leaflet and later there was a website. The group worked closely with Romsey Mill who managed their funds and provided an access point for referring more complex cases into City or County. Initially the coordinators group met weekly as needed.

Queen Edith A volunteer team set up a centralised support network (Queen Edith's Happy To Help) offering help with prescriptions, shopping, post, IT support and befriending. This was deliberately arranged as telephone-only. An answerphone line was created with Virtual Landline, and any calls to this were recorded and automatically emailed, as an MP3 attachment, to a Gmail account. A group of about half a dozen volunteers monitored this account during the daytime, taking a two-hour slot each. Organisation of their rota was done on Google Sheets, as was the listing of volunteers and tasks allocated. Communication between the administrators' group was through Slack. Emails to volunteers were done through an extension of the existing Mail Chimp email system. The team looked at the bespoke software (and email system of support requests) being offered in Coleridge and Cherry Hinton and decided that the telephone-only/Google Docs approach was simpler and more flexible.

Residents Association Old Newnham (ROAN) Initiated 16th March 2020 with an email to members, they asked people to identify roles they wanted to help with including offering help with technology. They decided early on rather than funnelling requests they would get people's permission to publish lists of neighbours who could help – this seemed to work well but did mean they were not able to track levels of activity.

Romsey Unlike the other mutual aid groups the decision was made to create a formal centralised model with a constitution. There was the suggestion by one of the trustees that this route may have made decision making easier but possibly lost some of the benefits of informal mutual aid allowing natural community leaders to emerge.

The group set up a slack based communication system whereby the information for phone/email/website was transferred and divided into 5 areas – only the volunteers from the area could see the information *'it reduced the number of eyes on the request'* only the person who volunteered got the details. There was a record of who saw what and volunteers reported on outcomes via slack. There remained a few street WhatsApp groups. The group had escalation guidelines with lists of what to do – signposting individuals or with their agreement (or where necessitated by safeguarding concerns) passing on their details then following this up to check something had been done.

Trumpington set up a helpline, a website and email for people to request help. Volunteers gave their availability and what they could offer, and coordinators would message people with a shop –they tried not to let clients get too dependent on a volunteer as they felt this was unfair on volunteers. Volunteers followed council provided guidance and payments were made via TVS. The group were light touch on information only asking for a postcode and house number not even name – they kept within their ward area. Supermarkets were supportive – so volunteers doing others shopping did not have to queue and they were able to get click and collect slots.

West Chesterton set up a helpline manned by a core group of 5 volunteers, they felt it was important that the phone was answered by a person. The helpline was promoted via a website and leaflets. Communication with volunteers was via WhatsApp.

'I think for me the simplicity of the system was a great success, being able to set this group up with firm council support, using WhatsApp to communicate with volunteers to quickly get help. I was overwhelmed how easy it was to ask people to do something, usually someone volunteered within minutes of a request going out. That was amazing.' Lucy Price

4.4 Importance of communication

Some of the ward groups produced a regular electronic newsletter or update while others added updates to their webpages. The common thread was that residents', locked down in their homes, were anxious to have hyper local information from a trusted source.

North Newnham Residents Association provided support as needed but they found what people there really wanted was reliable and local information obtained from the WCN meetings which they were able to disseminate to over 100 emails. Nearby **Residents Association Old Newnham** published a short update three times a week at the peak of the pandemic initially to 70 people, but they quickly gained a wider readership. RAON was also able to use their communication to support the local Newnham Walk Surgery to relay messages about news of the vaccine.

Queen Edith

'The weekly 'What's On' email newsletter changed into a more general information publication and ran daily from 17 March 2020 to 5 June 2020. [Examples can be seen here](#). Its circulation grew to over 1000 in this period, after which it went back to weekly schedule, as more of a general publication. [Examples of how it looks now can be seen here](#). There is no doubt in my mind that every area of the city should be encouraged and supported to have something similar, in preparation for any future emergency needs. It takes a long time to grow an email circulation, although this could be expedited by door-to-door promotion at a cost.' Chris Rand

From June 2020 the Forum also went back to producing its quarterly magazine, this helped ensure key information reached more people, 5,500 copies were delivered to households in the ward and parts of neighbouring wards.

Queen Edith's News Daily editions from March to June 2020 provide a very accessible and focussed daily account of what went on in the area during the first lockdown.

- [Queen Edith's news 2020 vol.03: March](#)
- [Queen Edith's news 2020 vol.04: April](#)
- [Queen Edith's news 2020 vol.05: May](#)
- [Queen Edith's news 2020 vol.06: June](#)

West Chesterton was also producing a weekly newsletter.

However, several groups noted that many of their more vulnerable clients and those attending food hubs did not get their information from email but relied on Face Book or word of mouth.

4.5 Volunteering

Help came in lots of different forms. People donated funds, businesses offered resources and skills, an undocumented number offered help direct to their neighbours. People signed up to requests

both nationally, regionally, and locally. The numbers of those who volunteered for the NHS responders' scheme is well documented but at a hyper local level the numbers of people who volunteered at the start of the first lockdown were also seen as extraordinary. Most of the ward groups commented that they initially had more volunteers than opportunities although volunteer numbers did drop off as people returned to work.

Abbey had 150 volunteers linked to street WhatsApp groups with a volunteer coordinator allocating requests to the appropriate group. Any concerns were referred to the Abbey People project worker. Abbey also had food hub volunteers who they organised into bubbles to improve Covid safety. Several people who came as visitors to the food hub went on to volunteer for it.

'People really got to know each other, and they built a lovely community feel' Nicky Shepard

Arbury Ward *'We were inundated by volunteers amazing, and we did get lots of requests for help. People were kind, generous just amazing.'* Sue Brignell

They had 40 volunteers and helped 60 households – shopping, prescriptions, dog walking and friendly phone calls *'it really helped for people to know someone else was there.'* Volunteers came from all areas and age groups. Many have gone on to help with the vaccination hubs and with the food hubs.

Cherry Hinton Had 150 volunteers sign up and allocated 75 people who needed regular help two volunteers each. This addressed safeguarding concerns, but they also wanted to build community.

'I don't know how many of these links have continued but it made a lot of people feel useful'. Rev Karin Voth Harman

Coleridge had 150 volunteers sign up via a leaflet drop asking people to volunteer- including lots of younger people new to volunteering.

'It was an amazing opportunity to help people and the community really came together.'

Vulnerable local residents' built trust with us and the volunteer. They (the residents) gained confidence and established a bit of a relationship with the volunteer. We helped people feel supported and not isolated – it provided a small lifeline without having to sign up to anything more formal. 'Sue Dennis

In contrast to Cherry Hinton's strategy of involving the maximum number of volunteers, Coleridge took the approach that clients wanted continuity so fewer volunteers were utilised. They recognised the downside was that volunteers were frustrated not to be able to help and dropped away.

East Chesterton *'We feel that we were able to provide support to many people who found themselves suddenly unable to help themselves'* Jonathan Clough

Kings Hedges At one stage they had 40-50 volunteers although this has dropped off as people have returned to work.

'People really enjoyed it and felt enriched by the opportunity to serve...they were disappointed when they couldn't help. I think people rediscovered the joy of volunteering.' Rev Dave Maher

NCCP had 60 volunteers recruited via Face Book. Their Face Book membership has risen from 68 to 516. Initially lots of volunteers fell away as people went back to work. They were able to involve people in vaccination volunteering.

Petersfield Volunteers were organised via area WhatsApp groups. For example, York Street had 60 volunteers on its WhatsApp group whereas some parts of the ward only had a handful for a larger area. People were happy to help beyond their street areas.

'I had some wonderful conversations with volunteers – amazing, good hearted people who had gone out of their way to help others.' Diane Hicks

Romsey An email went out to Over the Bridge and local Labour party members and there was a massive response. *'It was overwhelming'* the group ended up with 400 volunteers including members of the mosque *'It was a fertile environment people were really up for it.'* Andy Kennedy

Queen Edith Happy to help volunteer scheme had 250 sign up who offered Covid Support and Vaccination centre support – delivering 800 hours of volunteering at Cornford House vaccination centre. They put a robust system in place.

'People really wanted to get involved for altruistic reasons and for their own wellbeing. 'The positive contribution made them feel better'

The Forum is proud of the partnership that run the food hub – some of the visitors have gone on to be volunteers. One woman having used the food hub started volunteering for it and then initiated a clothes hub which the Forum supported her with it – she engaged local people (she had 500 people on her Face Book page) and drew them into using the food hub. (See the case study in this report point 9.2.3).

Prior to the pandemic the Forum participated in managed litter picks run by the City Open Spaces team. The Forum gave out litter pickers and people have just built litter picking into their daily routine.

The Happy To Help scheme and the Vaccination Centre scheme have now closed. Volunteers have been emailed to say that their information will be deleted, but that they will receive one further email to ask if they would like to be kept informed of further volunteering opportunities that become available.

Trumpington put the call out for volunteers through the Residents Association, leaflets, posters and the parish magazine and attracted about 80 volunteers. They did shopping, dog walking, prescription collection, gave lifts to urgent appointments and undertook welfare checks including supporting the council with door knocking to check on vulnerable people, who could not be contacted by phone.

'I was astonished by the number of volunteers and as a group of people we bonded really quickly.' Jane Reeson

West Chesterton A lot of people volunteered with over 100 at one point but most wanted to take on discreet tasks and the core work around manning the helpline was undertaken by a group of 5 people.

Volunteers told the coordinators that they enjoyed being part of the community and they had established a sense of place. Quite a number had not volunteered before and were described as 'newly civically engaged' attracted by the volunteering being hyperlocal and informal.

The group was not just a lifeline for 'people in need' but also so useful for those involved. For me personally it gave me something productive at a time where I couldn't work and wasn't going out, it gave me purpose and an intellectual challenge. I hope that the group has also made some

connections that wouldn't have been there before, I've met some new great people and worked really well with them despite having only physically met a handful of times I know of one person who ended up taking on 3-4 regular people to support – who was going weekly/regularly to pick up prescriptions etc, others were regularly doing tasks for different people. Lucy Price⁵

4.6 Challenges for groups

We asked the research participants to tell us what they found most challenging around setting up and running their groups.

4.6.1 Guidance needed sooner

Several groups mentioned that they would have liked more help sooner around data protection, pharmacy protocols, risk assessments, money handling and volunteer protocols. Setting up prescription collection was seen as particularly time consuming and problematic early on. However, it is now largely redundant as pharmacies have taken on the deliveries or there are online alternatives.

'Setting up all the protocols, for example over money were problematic and time consuming – in fact they weren't needed, things really operated on trust but it could have gone wrong.'

Risk Management

The mutual aid groups noted the tension between the mutual aid ethos and City Council requirements for more structured risk managed approaches particularly over safeguarding. They commented that mutual aid works based on people taking individual responsibility and operating with a consensus.

'We work on trust neighbour helping neighbour. It was useful to have some structure but you need to allow people to be creative with it...allowing processes to emerge is important'

'We didn't regard those helping as 'our volunteers' – no one vetted them...it was stressful I didn't want to end up liable for what others had done.'

There was also some discussion about the pros and cons of informal flat organisational structures versus more formal structures with clear leadership.

By contrast some of the existing groups expressed concern about the lack of safeguarding.

'I have been scared by the possibilities of what could go wrong.'

Data protection and data sharing

There were concerns about data privacy early on particularly when there were open WhatsApp groups. However, most groups addressed this and quickly put data protection protocols and privacy statements in place.

There have been issues over data sharing which initially made identifying vulnerable people who needed support difficult.

'We kept coming across people with pre-existing conditions. It was a bit of a minefield trying to link things up.'

⁵ Lucy's experiences are featured in a case study on page 35

'Data sharing was a big frustration it made it quite difficult and slowed things down. There is a concern people were missed'

One group commented that it took until May for the City Council to share data about vulnerable people.

Some pre-existing groups found their data on clients was inadequate and it highlighted the need to collect data more methodically and store it securely in the future.

4.6.2 Communication with Cambridge City Council

Contact with the City council was mostly good *'by and large the systems worked'* and groups were glad to have a direct phone line and email.

'It helped mediate the complexities of the council but the out of hours switchboard was very frustrating – you were ringing to talk about someone who was desperate, and you had to listen to a long-drawn-out recorded message about bins.'

Navigating the routes to help was tricky. I did go to the council for advice about one individual but was faced with the situation of consent – I was concerned we could inadvertently be supporting people who needed professional help and potentially support ineffectively and cause harm by neglect if that makes sense!

One group who reported a case of domestic violence to their City Community Officer was able to access the right help very quickly.

There was criticism of the wider City Council response from the Karim Foundation. *'The City have a lot of work to do to help ethnic minority communities feel they can approach them for support.'* They believe there needs to be more training to improve cultural understanding and a review of the barriers that stop people from these groups seeking help.

4.6.3 Complex cases

There is a worry about sustainability of support for people, particularly those with more complex needs. Volunteers are concerned about what will happen when they can no longer offer the same level of help.

Groups were finding themselves picking up the people who had fallen through the cracks and were in need but did not appear to meet criteria for support.

'On at least two occasions we came upon people who had no food or means of accessing it – because of Covid all normal means of support had fallen away.'

'We are aware of families whose children could have attended schools but chose not to send them because food vouchers made the difference between the family eating and not.'

4.6.4 Stigma around seeking help

Participants talked about coming across people who needed help but would not seek it because of what others in the community might think of them or the fear of interference or loss of independence. There was even a suggestion that some of the out of post code visitors to food hubs could be people who do not want to be seen to visit by people they know.

'I want to try and address this in the future by continuing to offer dry and fresh food alongside a social drop-in session every Saturday'. Anne Strauss Curate St James Queen Edith

'We find many of the neediest older people won't ask for official help and won't be referred to the food bank – also food bank support is for limited time and the community fridge isn't – the needs we are meeting are pre-existing the pandemic.' Ruth Bangor, Kings Hedges

One ward group gave the example of someone who was unable to work due to an injury, had refused to apply for any support so they had run out of food and money and had not eaten for several days.

People were resistant to signposting to befriending schemes and helplines – one ward group had the offer of counselling from a local resident, but no one took them up on it.

This issue around stigma is seen as a particular problem for certain ethnic minority communities. The Karim Foundation is a recently registered Cambridge charity rooted in the Bangladeshi community but 'here to help everyone' set up in response to the Pandemic. The Bangladeshi community had been disproportionately affected by the Pandemic as many in the community are self-employed and have suffered economically. This community also have a well-documented susceptibility to becoming seriously ill from Covid. Working with the Cambridge Food Bank the foundation have found very few South Asians use the food bank despite high levels of need – they believe this lack of use is due to a combination of culturally inappropriate food, a sense of shame at accepting charity amongst a tight knit community and a lack of education in the needs of this group e.g. small bags of rice are inadequate, men may forbid their wives from visiting the foodbank and they have to be discreet and can't queue outside.

The Karim Foundation have been trying to address the lack of culturally appropriate food by fundraising and purchasing food for the food hubs and by setting up food bank collection points in local ethnic minority shops, so far, they have engaged local shops aimed at Eastern Europeans, Africans, Chinese as well as Bangladeshi ethnic groups. The Foundation are part of the Food Poverty Alliance and work with Cambridge Community Ethnic Forum. They believe they have successfully identified 150 people the City Council would not have known needed help and have set about offering support that enables recipients to maintain their anonymity.

4.6.5 Need for volunteer management

Most of the pre-existing groups commented that it would have been very difficult to have achieved what they have without paid people to manage the volunteer effort – particularly around the food hubs.

'Working with volunteers can be difficult as you can't always be sure things will be done and not having a hierarchy to the organisation made decision making tricky sometimes.'

4.6.6 Burn out

In common with everyone else the ward groups were set up to respond to an emergency that very few anticipated lasting so long, they were not set up for the long haul.

'... This goes on and on – in that we used to run a manned phone service (call forwarding to personal mobiles) which ended up with 2 of us being on for 1 or 2 weeks and then off, it became a pressure as it meant you always had to have your phone on you and be ready to answer a query.'

'More recently we feel that there are a number of households who might be taking advantage of the services we offer. We don't feel in a position to judge but would like to be able to pass support for these households to the relevant council social service. In the meantime, we will continue to provide support.'

4.6.7 Prejudice towards faith groups

Faith groups were crucial to the success of many of the ward groups.

'There does seem to be a lot of secular prejudice against involving faith groups. Yes, they do have an ulterior motive, but they do a lot to serve their community'

'Most of the food hubs have been based in churches; mosques and temples have provided food and Cambridge Buddhist centre has done a lot to support the vaccination clinics.'

Another participant commented that they felt there had been anti church feeling from the Council in the past but now believe with the work on homelessness and the pandemic the Council are more likely to recognise them as an asset.

'Churches are missed in plain sight. Don't assume we are here to drag people in...We are trained in pastoral care, we are interested in the human condition, we listen, and we are open to people connecting with us sometimes spiritually but not always.'

'I felt there was a shared understanding it was really powerful...Our practical help and the Church pastoral care brought about transformative change.'

Cambridge Central Mosque as well as a place of worship also sees itself as a community asset. There are plans to work with various organisations including Arthur Rank Hospice and GPs surgeries to improve the experience and the support available for the Muslim community.

5 What advice would the ward groups give to others

In response to the question what advice the participants would give to someone facing a similar situation several common themes emerged. Interestingly although there was some frustration in getting the right processes in place early on, particularly around data protection and handling money, most research participants felt that it was important that they had been able to create ways of working that suited the resources they had and the needs of their local community.

'Keep it simple – keep it agile. React to the requests and build the service your community needs'
Lucy Price, West Chesterton

5.1 Give things a try

- *'Make something work that is good enough'* Tony Watts RAON
- *'Just get in there and connect with other people. Don't be afraid there is a lot you can do that will make a real difference. Have the confidence to jump in.'* Sophia Cameron Christie, Market Ward
- *'If you'd like to make a network, I'd just say give it a go. The worst that can happen is no-one responds to a first leaflet, but more likely than not, there will be other people on the street who would like to connect.'* Julia Sang, Stretton Ave
- *'Don't wait for something to happen, be active get involved.'* Andy Kennedy, Romsey Ward

5.2 Prioritise communication and get to grips with IT

- Put WhatsApp and Face book in place wherever possible build on what is there. Nearly all the Mutual Aid groups started with WhatsApp groups or Face book.

- Leaflet homes and put-up posters – many of those seeking help didn't have internet access. Most areas leafleted multiple times both to offer help and ask for volunteers. Castle Ward leafleted all households 5 times.
- Set up a helpline. West Chesterton estimated that most of their requests for help came via the phone rather than email or WhatsApp.
- Set up an email in some cases this was linked to a website and a helpline
- Keep in touch with others involved in helping.

5.3 Be realistic and flexible

- Most participants accepted the need to protect data and give volunteers the information to keep themselves and those they were helping safe. But at the same time people felt it was important to trust people.
- *'It was the soft stuff that made the difference. People were uninhibited by rules and regulations'* Mike Davey, Petersfield
- *'Be flexible with what you ask of people we have someone with a young family he can't run a food hub session, but he will come at the end and help the clear up. You have to think of different ways of doing things.'* Dave Maher Kings Hedges
- *'Build a team and play to people's strengths and give them autonomy.'* Sam Davies, Queen Edith

5.4 Put in place seed funding

- Most of the group commented on the value of the initial £1000 grant provided by the City Council. It was useful for 'clearing blockers'

5.5 Collaborate and leave space for others to help

- *'Create partnerships you can achieve more'* Karin Voth Harmon Vicar St Andrews Cherry Hinton
- *'Look out for burn out and create space for others to step in – we should have spread the load sooner'* Nicky Shepard, Abbey People
- *'People will step up to help if there is real need'* Sue Dennis Coleridge
- *'Partnerships are key. Little things can make a big impact, do the best you can with what you have.'* Matt Rowe, Arbury Ward

5.6 Create more opportunities for collaboration and partnership between statutory and voluntary sector.

- There is a widely expressed view that Cambridge Council has reaped the rewards of the investment they have made by building close links with voluntary sector organisations and the community.
- *'The success was years in the making, Binnie running the Eat and Meet, the work of the food poverty alliance. We all went to lots of boring meetings over the years, but it really paid off. People knew and trusted each other. The City Council were brilliant and ran a genuinely well run response'* Rev.Dave Maher Kings Hedges Ward
- *'Invest in social capital it made a huge difference that Abbey People were already there and had built up trust with the community.'* Nicky Shepard Abbey People

6 Ward group's longer-term plans

6.1 New rules of engagement for pre-existing groups

Most of the pre-existing ward organisations are planning to retain some element of the support they offered during the crisis, and many are also emerging with strengthened (often pre-existing) partnerships with other local organisations which they want to build on.

Abbey Ward Community Response although the support with shopping and prescriptions seems to have eased off, they are in the process of checking in on levels of activity with the volunteers on the WhatsApp groups they manage. They are still supporting a small number of families with food parcels. The food hub which has closely involved Barnwell Baptist Church (where it was initially based) remains very well used.

Abbey People are currently undertaking a feasibility project and talking to Cambridge Food Bank about the possibility of setting up a Food Bite shop (like the one in Arbury Court). Currently the food hub does not receive City council funding. Abbey People see the situation in Abbey as deteriorating, they have identified a 320% increase in benefit claims in Abbey between Jan 2019 to Sept 2020 (source Cambridgeshire insight) It includes families who have not needed help before, those whose savings have been used up, people unable to cope on furlough or laid off.

'We know that when we give the families we support food hampers it means these people don't have to choose between food and fuel that week. Nicky Shepard, CEO Abbey People

Abbey People only have funding for their CEO post until December 2021 so they are seeking more funds. Abbey People also want to employ a community support worker as they feel there is a major gap in provision for vulnerable families.

Cambridge United Community Trust are also part of the emergency response in Abbey as well as being active in Arbury and Trumpington. Community Officer Simon Wall is keen to get people to mingle more and expand their social circle to help tackle the sense of isolation. Simon also thinks that many of those that were helped want to offer to give back now and get involved. He also wants to build on digital confidence.

'So many people missed out – they need the reassurance that if things lock down again, they will still be able to stay connected'. Simon plans to continue to work with Cambridge Online with this. The Trust also intends to build on cross generational interactions to increase mutual support. They have funding for healthy walks and want to get volunteers involved with this.

During the Pandemic the Trust ran a 'Fit and fed' programme for primary school children during the holidays in core wards – kids turned up played football and took home a cooked lunch cooked by the 1st team chef – they will carry on with this over the summer. Simon is also running a holiday camp at St Galfred's School with Abbey People during the summer for children with a pupil premium involving other organisations such as Cambridge Science Centre.

Arbury Community Response managed by Arbury Baptist Church are in the process of discussing what to do with their volunteer database and certainly intend to run a thank you event.

'We will continue to do whatever we can to support the local community and be as responsive as possible to what the developing community needs are. As people move out of 'Crisis mode' we need

to be aware of the additional needs of our community – continue to focus on our [community dream](#) that came out of listening and surveying our community.’ Matt Rowe Minister

Cherry Hinton Response is a collaboration of St Andrews Church, Cherry Hinton Baptist Church, Cherry Hinton Community Benefit Society and Cherry Hinton Festival. Vicar of St Andrews’ Karin Voth Harman explained how they want to keep a bank of volunteers to engage in the community – tea dances, festival, library – to create events to allow people to feel connected. The existing volunteer bank was specifically for pandemic relief so they are emailing them all to ask if they will sign up to a new community database. They hope to continue the food hub and have around 20 committed volunteers many of whom have struggled themselves. Karin is slightly conflicted over whether the food hub is the answer in the longer term (she is part of the food poverty alliance) but it has the added advantage of reducing food waste, connecting people, and enabling signposting.

They want to continue to work with the other groups ‘more fun and more resource’ Their role to ‘boost peoples spirits and recovery – expect it to be tough especially after ending of furlough. People have been heroic and their reserves are depleted.’

Cherry Hinton Baptist pastor Nic Boynes explained how their church had been continuing to offer support via online friendship groups, outdoor singing, family zoom quizzes, online holiday clubs and messy play in the park. He envisages a hybrid approach in the future with people attending and watching services online *‘one thanksgiving service included live contributions from 40 people in 7 different countries.’*

Help in Kings Hedges based at the Church of the Good Shepherd – the helpline is quiet now and the remaining volunteers are helping with the community fridge. They are planning some sort of thank you for volunteers and will ask them if they are happy for their details to be kept for any future response. They have a concern that there are people needing help but that they do not know about it. They have decided to wind down the fridge by 21st July. They will then run holiday lunches for 4 weeks. With regard to visitors to the fridge they feel 50% are coming for food and 50% for companionship – *‘people arrive to queue up so they can have a chat’* They are looking to reimagine the community fridge perhaps engaging in [Camerados](#) principles creating a public living room. Their decision is also affected by what happens with the central food hub at Buchan Street (as they don’t have enough storage space).

The church building is to undergo a major redevelopment which was in motion pre-pandemic, but ideas have been very much refined by this experience – *‘We are now happy to just give things a go. We want to open the space up to councillors to run surgeries, a pop up café to help loneliness, Red Hen – we really want it to be a community hub.’*

North Cambridge Community Forum (NCCF) who also supported the Kings Hedges and Arbury area will be looking to involve business more to support the community and will be inviting the volunteers on their emergency database to sign up as community volunteers. They feel people are more concerned about their local area than pre pandemic, they have plans to engage the whole community in activities and they want to see improvements to the local area. They are particularly concerned about what they describe as damaged and potentially dangerous play equipment on Nuns Way Recreation Ground.

Residents Association Old Newnham is in discussion about how it can maintain the enhanced sense of community, they see a potential role offering low level support for people coming out of hospital and believe their communications network will be needed again with Autumn booster vaccinations.

Queen Edith's Community Forum are now more ambitious about what they could do. Chair Sam Davies talked about how the situation has *'reset people's expectation about how they can contribute to the area. There is more of a sense of urgency, a sense of giving back and an awareness of diversity of need it has helped break down the barriers.'* The Forum's close partners St James' Church see their building as a community asset that can create a flexible community space. The Church want to focus on children and have applied for Section 106 money so they can improve the kitchen to run holiday lunches and community meals. They are also seeking to address social isolation and as a starting point are running a Friendship café supported by volunteers from Nightingale Park.

6.2 Status of new groups

Some of the new groups formed at the start of the pandemic have stopped operating or are close to this point.

Two ward groups **Coleridge Community Action** and **Trumpington Volunteer Service**(TVS) have closed their support helpline with Coleridge retaining its food hub (the Trumpington food hub was always separately organised to TVS). In June the 20 Coleridge food hub volunteers were consulted about their food hub's future and they decided that they did not want to form a separately constituted group – they have agreed to support the hub until August and review the situation then. There is the possibility that St Martin's Church may take the hub on in some form.

Market Mutual Aid as of 3rd June had not had any requests for support for a month and was considering whether to continue to monitor the help email. Cambridge Community Kitchen currently based in Market ward (but offering support across the City) are planning to continue providing food to those who need it.

The other new groups at the time of writing this research in June 2021 were considering their options.

Castle Covid Support Association have plans for some reopening events with concerts in Eddington and St Augustine. The crisis resulted in an awareness of how ready people were to volunteer. They are discussing morphing into Castle Community Support Association where they offer a list of possible tasks volunteers might perform for neighbours e.g., moving a piece of furniture or replacing a light bulb. They are going to canvas their volunteers to see what they think of offering to undertake a couple of tasks per year. If they get enough interest, they will pursue the idea. People seem happy to accept this sort of help *'not prying into their affairs'* and they have all the protocols in place and already follow up any client/volunteer contact (although at present volunteers do not enter people's houses). *'People are delighted to help'*

'It takes an emergency to stimulate change. It got people to look beyond their own lives and concerns about parking or planning and for the most part took the university out of the equation as they turned in to care for their own.' Judith Perry, Castle

East Chesterton Mutual Aid are discussing the future of their group now and have canvassed the opinion of their volunteers. *'We think that our current centralised model is likely to need to stop fairly soon, but this might be achieved through a transition to smaller support groups based around individuals needing support or smaller community groups that have been established as a result of what we have done. A major benefit has been the creation of relationships and friendships which did not exist before. We believe that some of these are likely to endure and provide continuing good results.'* Jonathan Clough East Chesterton

Petersfield Mutual Aid are conscious of the recent change to the ward boundary changing the character of ward which now extends south of the railway towards Trumpington. They are particularly conscious of difficulty in connecting with people in flats around the main railway station. They will need to consult with their volunteers via the WhatsApp groups – as there is no hierarchy or structure and ideally, they want to keep the group's informality. The group have developed very close links with Romsey Mill which they hope to build on.

Romsey Mutual Aid have had their first AGM and are now reflecting on their next steps. They want to talk to care and support providers such as Care Network and Social care to see if they can add value at the hyper local level. They also feel they may have a role as a repository for information to facilitate mutual aid elsewhere.

West Chesterton Mutual Aid 'Will stay in a holding pattern for now' they have signposted their 61 volunteers to other activities and to supporting other wards particularly East Chesterton – their privacy policy says they will delete volunteer details once support is no longer needed but they are unsure they have reached this point yet.

'I don't know if there might be a need for a low-level support service for vulnerable people into the future – those who aren't quite ready for a full care package/home support etc. but need a bit of help with odd things. I don't think this is sustainable at a West Chesterton level though. Perhaps a north Cambridge group? Also, I think now this is moving into a post covid vaccine world, we may need more structure, insurance, safety etc. (not that we weren't cautious to begin with) and this may necessitate a more formal group/committee etc.' Lucy Price, West Chesterton

'We aren't formally organised, but I think there are enough people on the street who are happy to get involved with initiatives if someone suggests them. There are lots of people who contribute to the plant exchange at the parklet and we're in the process of seeing if we can apply for the 'trees for streets' scheme, where we'd sponsor a tree on the street. Julia Sang, Stretton Ave Group

6.3 Importance of continued cross ward collaboration

There is a lot of support for the idea of wards continuing to work together in some sort of facilitated purposeful way.

'Ordinary people, and I include myself, have no idea about the hidden levels of deprivation...continued cross-ward links will help grow this awareness.' Andy Kennedy, Romsey

Cambridge United Community Trust feel they have a much better sense of people working together.

'Different organisations have got together it makes sense' Simon Wall CUCT. Simon would like to see a forum for seniors.⁶

Judith Perry, Castle described feeling that a real sense of community has emerged, the network meetings have been a real eye opener to what living in an area of the city with deprivation means *'It brought home the inequality and a sense of City-wide solidarity.'*

⁶ The Cambridge Older People's Network was initiated in December 2021 and involves a number of voluntary and statutory organisations meeting quarterly - for more information contact christine@cambridgecvcs.org.uk

7 Conclusions

7.1 One size does not fit all

The Ward groups reflect the character of the wards they supported. They are a mix of spontaneous mutual aid style groups, new groups facilitated by local councillors to deliver emergency support and pre-existing groups collaborating with other community stakeholders. Some groups have the support of staff from faith groups and pre-existing voluntary sector groups others were entirely volunteer led. Some are constituted with authorised decision makers others are totally informal and operated by consensus. Despite these differences all appear to have had similar levels of success delivering the emergency support their communities required⁷. There were universal areas of need identified around access to food, medicine and essentials and social and emotional support. Those asking for help came from a diverse range of backgrounds including people who had never asked for help before. Most of the wards also sought to provide activities for families, especially while children were being educated at home.

7.2 The value of pre-existing relationships

All the groups collaborated with other organisations to obtain guidance, access to infrastructure or material help. However, the pre-existing groups were able to benefit from relationships built up over the years with other organisations and with local businesses. Many of these links have been encouraged and supported by the networking opportunities facilitated by the City Council Community Team, by infrastructure groups such as CECF, GET and CCVS and forums such as the Food Poverty Alliance and Cambridge 2030. These contacts allowed the groups to capitalise on trust and familiarity to draw on vital skills and knowledge. These strengthened links between organisations are something groups expressed an intention of building on in the future.

7.3 Creating a successful partnership between the community and City Council

Much of the success of the emergency response offered by the ward groups was due to the partnership between local people offering support that was hyperlocal, rapid, empathetic, and informal alongside the expertise and resource of the City Council. Each group established processes that worked for their community and forged alliances with other key community stakeholders.

Most of the pre-existing ward organisations are planning to retain some element of the support they offered during the crisis, and many are also emerging with strengthened (often pre-existing) partnerships with other local organisations which they want to build on.

The speed of response from the City Council in supporting the development of the ward groups and in setting up the Ward Cluster Network (WCN) was identified as crucial. The quality of the support from individual City officers was invaluable, particularly when dealing with more complex cases. Ward groups were also very grateful for the £1000 'seed funding' which allowed them to obtain insurance, necessary pieces of equipment and emergency supplies for those in need.

⁷ The ward groups appear to have been successful in that they reported that they largely met all the relevant requests for help they received. However, there is a need for caution as this does not consider the needs of hidden groups who may have been unable or unwilling to access the help on offer.

However, there was some criticism of the City Council. On occasions out of hours support was hard to reach and there was a delay in sharing key data about people needing support.

7.4 Getting the right communication tools in place

Those groups with communication tools already in place such as Facebook and local newsletters (both email and printed) had an advantage when it came to quickly sharing information, engaging, and managing volunteers and finding those needing support. Repeatedly groups reported how residents valued having local, trustworthy, and accessible information.

All the groups made use of leaflets delivered to homes and posters in key locations, such as chemists and shops, so they could reach those not online. Those seeking help were directed to helplines and emails manned by volunteer coordinators.

WhatsApp also proved to be a well-used tool for many of the groups, particularly for communicating with volunteers, although there were concerns around protecting privacy.

7.5 Setting up and running local emergency volunteer taskforces

The crisis created a common experience, everyone was restricted in their movement and lived with the possibility of becoming infected with the virus and having to self-isolate. People could see what was needed and felt able to offer their help. The Ward groups tapped into this wave of empathy and for the most part people were onboarded quickly and with minimal red tape.

Ward groups talked about volunteers gaining an enhanced sense of community – they enjoyed being part of something momentous. The sense from the Ward volunteer coordinators was that many volunteers had not volunteered before, they found themselves with time to give and were attracted by the hyperlocal, flexible, and informal opportunities on offer. The direct interactions with beneficiaries meant that volunteers got instant feedback and could see the value of what they were doing.

In all areas of the City the numbers offering help in the first lockdown far exceeded the requests for help. Most of those that did help wanted to be flexible, perhaps because they were working from home or had caring responsibilities. As the months progressed the numbers of engaged volunteers reduced and the needs of the people requesting help became more complex. More recently many people reengaged by offering to help at vaccination centres – once again the need was obvious to people, they could see how they could help, most of these roles were one-off opportunities and the processes to get involved were very straightforward.

As the pandemic progressed the demands on the reduced number of volunteers grew highlighting the need for clear and supportive volunteer management. All the groups operated on the basis of mutual trust with their volunteers and provided their volunteers with guidance around health and safety and safeguarding. However, the more complex support needed by some people did present challenges – although all the groups recognised the considerable support given by council officers. Most of the pre-existing groups commented that it would have been very difficult to have achieved what they have without some paid, experienced people to manage the volunteer effort.

As of June/July 2021 several of the groups have closed down their volunteer response, some have deleted their volunteer databases. Some groups have asked their volunteers for permission to retain their data to keep them informed of future community volunteering needs, whilst other groups are still reviewing their options particularly in the light of rising rates of Covid infection. Those with volunteers running food hubs are looking to wind these down by the end of the summer.

7.6 Getting essential guidance in place

Most of the groups struggled at the start of the Pandemic because of a lack of focussed information particularly around data protection, pharmacy protocols, risk assessments, money handling and volunteer protocols.

The mutual aid groups noted the tension between the mutual aid ethos (people taking individual responsibility and operating with a consensus) and City Council requirements for more structured risk managed approaches, particularly over safeguarding.

The groups also had trouble identifying other sources of help and support for people because of the lack of any up-to-date directory of services.

7.7 Exposing inequalities to a wider audience

In most wards' volunteers identified issues around food and fuel poverty, disability, and mental ill-health. It became apparent to the ward groups very early on that whilst the crisis exacerbated these issues many were pre-existing. This raised concerns around the sustainability of support for people, particularly those with more complex needs. Volunteers are concerned about what will happen when they can no longer offer the same level of help.

There is also concern about how to address the stigma some people feel around seeking help. Groups identified people who were unwilling to be seen to need help and were wary of engaging with more formal channels of support. Older people and people from minority ethnic groups were particularly reluctant to engage with help that required referrals such as the food bank.

Food hubs have continued to be well used throughout the Pandemic in all areas of the City. The consensus view is that most food hub users are those struggling with issues not directly related to the Pandemic and that even if the impact of the crisis eases their issues around food poverty will continue.

7.8 Business support for the community

Businesses responded where they could see need and could see how they could help meet the need. Those with closed kitchens, stocks of unwanted food and furloughed staff could see a clear link to providing support to tackle food poverty or food for those self-isolating – this has been well documented in Cambridge Sustainable Food's Report – [Cambridge a Community at Work](#). Local food stores and providers supported food hubs and food banks. Similarly, businesses offered support to tackle digital inequality and educational materials for children being home schooled. Local taxi firms gave free lifts to medical appointments and delivered essential supplies to those in need.

7.9 Ward Cluster Network legacy

There is a renewed sense of City-wide solidarity which the ward groups are keen to nurture. People are interested in partnering with other ward groups to support projects to deliver wider community benefit. There is a sense of enhanced civic pride over what has been achieved and how people responded to offer help. Several groups expressed an interest in marking this achievement in some way.

Some of the groups have already closed with their key volunteers moving on to other projects or returning to work or other responsibilities. Those groups with food hubs are also winding them

down with several in discussion with Cambridge Sustainable Food and other partner organisations to create sustainable options such as community fridges in community settings.

Amongst the pre-existing groups and some of the new groups there is the desire to retain the community spirit they saw emerge and to try to focus it to provide additional, meaningful, sustainable support for local people in need.

8 Recommendations

These are our recommendations for the consideration of the City Council and the local voluntary sector.

8.1 Build on local authority investment in social capital

- Continue to invest in the community development team, the community officers were crucial to the success of the ward groups.
- Continue to support the work of the food hubs for as long as they are required and support these organisations to source and provide culturally appropriate food for all clients
- Continue with the Eat and Meet style networking groups that brought individuals and, statutory and voluntary sector groups together in particular locations.
- Continue to consult and engage community groups in the development of key strategies for example around anti-poverty and inequality.
- Build on the sense of trust and valued partnership between the groups and the City Council
- Invest in more cross-cultural training for front line staff, particularly in customer services, to support awareness of obstacles minority communities face in understanding and engaging with support.
- Create seed funding pots under local community control to get new ideas underway.

8.2 Build on cross-ward cooperation

- Establish a ward group digital forum where groups can share and develop ideas.
- Run occasional network meetings, frequency to be agreed around key topics of interest to maintain connections.

8.3 Create a repository of useful guidance for the future

Although this research has helped capture the development and experiences of the City ward groups there is also a need to create a repository of detailed guidance, protocols, and policies for use in any future emergency. The intention would be for communities to select the tools that best meet their needs. This might be something one of the ward groups might be willing to take on or the council may wish to progress. Alternatively, ward groups could email CCVS their templates, policies and protocols and CCVS could store them on its website.

8.4 Improve signposting to existing services

The groups identified a need for clarity on existing provision currently hampered by the lack of any up-to-date directory of services. There is a need to investigate ways to support effective signposting that is sustainable.⁸

⁸ There could be a role for <https://www.haycambridge.co.uk/>

8.5 Support for local communications

Some wards do not have a regular non Covid specific newsletter or community email (like a parish magazine) we would recommend seeking to develop a community newsletter for each ward, both to share community specific information and to build a database to share information efficiently. Several of the wards already have well developed communications with residents and might be willing to provide some guidance to others. To ensure digital inclusion there should be printed communications also made available. Some support and funding will be needed to help initiate these new communications.

8.6 Improve access to volunteering

Encourage those ward groups that have not yet deleted their volunteer databases to ask their volunteers to sign up to hear about future community volunteering. Identify and develop ways of encouraging people to volunteer both locally and in the wider community, including local businesses, that fits in with their lifestyles and is responsive to need.

Encourage those looking for volunteers to identify roles that have local appeal and that can be flexible. Promote the need to reduce all unnecessary barriers to engage people in volunteering quickly but without compromising safety. CCVS will continue to work closely with local community groups to offer guidance and training around these ideas. The City Council could seek to lead by example and review its own procedures, for example dropping barriers such as right to work checks for its volunteers.

Create improved gateways to volunteering:

- Up to date, responsive online brokerage that allows those looking to volunteer a quick and efficient way to find and apply for local opportunities.
- promote volunteering through a system of local communications (see point 2.5).

Continue to offer support for those who face obstacles in engaging with volunteering. Cambridge City Council funds CCVS to run a project offering people support and engaging community groups in improving their levels of inclusivity in volunteering. The Council also promotes [Time Credits scheme](#) which is aimed at engaging new people into volunteering particularly in specific wards.

8.7 Improved engagement with business

In 2019 Cambridge City Council commissioned CCVS to write a report on business engagement with the local voluntary sector, [Making Connections](#). The recommendations from this report are still very relevant with businesses demonstrating their continued willingness to offer support through the Pandemic. Amongst the recommendations were the creation of digital resources including an online brokerage with resources aimed at business to support their understanding of the needs of the sector and to help them identify where they can offer support. Any brokerage for business could be combined with that proposed for mainstream volunteering (Point 2.6).

8.8 Focus on improving digital inclusion

Issues around digital inequality have highlighted the need for ongoing action to give everyone access to what has become a necessity in terms of equal access to information, support and opportunity. This is a key area of the work being undertaken by the [Cambridgeshire Digital Partnership](#) who see an important ongoing role for the City Council in providing the kit, data and skills residents experiencing digital inequality need.

8.9 Recognise what has been achieved

The Mayor's Volunteer for Cambridge Awards have been very well received but there may also be interest in creating a broader recognition of what has been experienced and achieved. It could be an opportunity for the City Council, local business and universities to come together to recognise the contributions made by local people to their communities. The purpose of any recognition event would be to demonstrate the continued value placed on neighbourhood support.

9 Appendices

9.1 Appendix one: list of research participants

Nicky Shephard CEO Abbey People	Abbey
Simon Wall Community Officer Cambridge United Community Trust	Abbey
Abdul Hye, Pipasha restaurant/ The Shah-Jala Islamic Centre food hub	Abbey/Arbury
Sue Brignell Arbury Community Support	Arbury
Matt Rowe, Minister Arbury Baptist Church	Arbury
Ricardo Arbelaes, Trustee North Cambridge Community Forum (NCCP)	Arbury/Kings Hedges
Golzar Zandi, Project & Development Coordinator NCCP	Arbury/Kings Hedges
Judith Perry, Castle Covid Support Association	Castle
Karin Voth Harman, Vicar St Andrews	Cherry Hinton
Nic Boynes Pastor, Cherry Hinton Baptist Church	Cherry Hinton
Sue Dennis, Coleridge Community Action	Coleridge
Chrissy Cole, Curate St Martin's	Coleridge
Jonathan Clough East Chesterton Mutual Aid	East Chesterton
Ruth Bangor, Help in Kings Hedges	Kings Hedges
Dave Maher, Vicar Church of the Good Shepherd	Kings Hedges
Guido Barzini, community fridge volunteer	Kings Hedges
Marietta van der Tol, community fridge coordinator	Kings Hedges
Sophia Cameron Christie, Cambridge Market Ward Covid-19 Mutual Aid	Market
Shrike, Cambridge Community Kitchen	Market
Dai Davies, North Newnham Community Support	North Newnham
Tony Watts, Residents Association Old Newnham	Newnham
Cllr Mike Davey, Petersfield Mutual Aid	Petersfield
Cllr Sam Davies, Chair Queen Edith's Community Forum	Queen Edith
Anne Strauss, Curate St James'	Queen Edith
Chris Rand, Queen Edith's Community Forum	Queen Edith
Andy Kennedy, Trustee Romsey Mutual Aid	Romsey
Diane Hicks, Romsey Mill	Romsey/Petersfield
Shahida Rahman, Trustee Cambridge Central Mosque/Trustee Karim Foundation	Romsey
Kal Karim, Trustee Karim Foundation	
Jane Reeson, Trumpington Volunteer Service	Trumpington
Clara Todd, West Chesterton Mutual Aid	West Chesterton
Lucy Price, West Chesterton Mutual Aid	West Chesterton
Julia Sang, Stretton Avenue Group	West Chesterton

9.2 Appendix two: case studies

9.2.1 A Coordinator's Story – West Chesterton Mutual Aid



Photo courtesy of Lucy Price

'The group was not just a lifeline for 'people in need' but also so useful for those involved. For me personally it gave me something productive at a time where I couldn't work and wasn't going out, it gave me purpose and an intellectual challenge. Lucy Price

'I think for me the simplicity of the system was a great success, being able to set this group up with firm council support, using WhatsApp to communicate with volunteers to quickly get help. I was overwhelmed how easy it was to ask people to do something, usually someone volunteered within minutes of a request going out. That was amazing.

I suppose I am most proud of being a part of some good, in a terrible time, being able to effect change/input help from my sofa, without going outside. I was personally in a position where I was living a shielded lifestyle and my business had closed down and I struggled with that. Having the option to help others was really empowering and something to be proud of.

I think the most challenging thing has been dealing with tricky situations - so people who needed support were contacting us, and at times navigating the routes to help was tricky. I did go to the council for advice about one individual but was faced with the situation of consent - I was concerned we could inadvertently be supporting people who needed professional help and potentially support ineffectively and cause harm by neglect if that makes sense!

However conversely that situation I feel has been one of our biggest successes- this individual is a regular client, gets regular shopping and contact and I feel we may have made a big difference with this person and that feels good.

I think the other issue was as the pandemic eased and people found their new ways of living, sometimes requests were hard to fulfil and not being able to go and help directly was a challenge for me personally.

Also challenging was the fact this goes on and on - in that we used to run a manned phone service (call forwarding to personal mobiles) which ended up with 2 of us being on for 1 or 2 weeks and then off, it became a pressure as it meant you always had to have your phone on you and be ready to answer a query - however we usually had 1-2 calls a week so it wasn't a huge issue just more the sense of always being on. We have resolved this issue though by moving to an answerphone service that we check approx. every day if not several times a day.

I hope that the group has also made some connections that wouldn't have been there before, I've met some new great people and worked really well with them despite having only physically met a handful of times.

It's been a pretty special thing to be involved with and to help run and it's amazing we aren't needed very much now however slightly sad too!'

9.2.2 Putting food on the table – Arbury Community Fridge



The people visiting the community fridge for food included families and individuals who had never had to seek help before and did not know how to access support. Many visitors to the fridge also had significant emotional needs. Signposting to sources of help and support was important as the issues some people faced extended beyond food poverty to include domestic violence or loneliness, or depression.

The Fridge operated from April 2020 until 21st July 2021 out of The Church of the Good Shepherd. The operation was managed by a very small team associated with the Church who set the whole thing up over an intensive 2-week period and who drew on a wider pool of volunteers.

The core tasks in running the fridge fell into 2 areas:

- recruiting and managing the volunteers
- managing the logistics around supplying the food.

The volunteers came from the local community and personal contacts through the churches and the university. 70-80 volunteers were involved in total. At the beginning of the Pandemic the team were keenly aware of their duty of care and ensured those volunteers who needed to shield were kept safe and that their wider team of volunteers were not exposed to unnecessary risk. They had just enough aprons, gloves and face masks and they organised the rota so that the same teams of people worked together, and no one volunteered more than once in a week to reduce exposure. Later they received donations of handmade masks from people making them at home and donations of face shields from North Cambridge Community Partnership. The additional PPE was gratefully received and anything the fridge did not need was shared with local care homes and care providers.

Because of the risks of infection for older volunteers, the profile of the front-line volunteers at the fridge was younger and during the school holidays some 16- to 18-year-olds offered to help, including one girl who volunteered over the summer having come along to collect food with her mother.

Initially the food came from local businesses who offered surplus stock, but this quickly became unsustainable as the situation progressed. The establishment of the Buchan Street central hub to disseminate food donations, particularly from FareShare, was hugely beneficial although the uncertainty around Buchan Street Hub's continued funding made it difficult to plan ahead. In addition to the hub deliveries all the different food hubs and fridges had volunteers who made pickups from local food shops in response to messages from a WhatsApp group. Although this gave access to additional food it was a difficult system to operate with coordinators always feeling they were on call and sometimes creating competitive situations between food hubs – raising a question about the benefit of having a centralised collection and distribution system for these donations. The amounts of food collected could be very variable and the food was not always useable because it was out of date. The fridge used its own funds to supplement what they could offer by buying produce from local businesses who sold it at cost. Local businesses that offered their support included Les Ward and Budgens in Arbury Court, Nisa Store, Pod Olem, Iqbro and The Cambridge Fruit Company.

The fridge made food available to people who needed it and gave support and help wherever possible. It brought people together who would never normally have met and although they came from very different backgrounds and sometimes faiths, they found they had a lot in common. Although the fridge has now closed some of the volunteers want to continue to offer people the opportunity to meet and are planning on running some coffee mornings in the Autumn.

9.2.3 From visitor to volunteer! Queen Edith's Community Forum



Queen Edith Community Forum Food and clothes hub volunteer, Rachel is a great believer in helping where she can 'I love helping people it makes me feel good'

Rachel started visiting the Queen Edith's Food Hub, not long after it opened, and it didn't take long for her to get involved and become one of their longest serving volunteers. Alongside food donations people

also donated clothes which proved popular. Rachel knew people in the community who needed new clothes but couldn't afford them or didn't want to go near shops during the pandemic, so she suggested setting up a clothes hub.

With the support of Queen Edith Community Forum Rachel converted a shed into somewhere to store donated clothes and she regularly invites people onto her front drive to look through the items or takes clothes over to the car park when the food hub is open. People know I'm on their level and they feel comfortable to come to me -it's brilliant to see people reusing stuff'

People haven't just needed material help Rachel has seen how people really wanted to have a chat and for some people the food hub has been their only opportunity to connect with others. 'It's not just about food, we're giving them company. It helps them to off load their problems we all need someone to talk to.'

'Volunteering at the food hub has been so rewarding, just knowing that you're making sure someone is going to be able to eat that night and has had the chance to talk to someone.'

9.2.4 Supplying ethnically diverse food - Karim Foundation and Cambridge Community Ethnic Forum

Karim Foundation have been working with Cambridge Community Ethnic Forum and with local grocers to help Cambridge Foodbank cater for the dietary needs of those from minority ethnic groups. Follow this link to read more <https://karimfoundation.co.uk/improving-food-diversity-in-cambridge/>