



Voluntary & Community Strategy

October 2020

Foreword to the Voluntary and Community Strategy by Watford's Deputy Mayor



Welcome to Watford's Voluntary and Community Strategy

Voluntary groups in Watford have played a huge part in supporting the community in recent months. Despite the difficulties and challenges created by the Covid-19 pandemic, local volunteers, charities, faith groups and people across the town have shown creativity and adaptability to support each other. We want to do everything we can to support their hard work and this Strategy is a step towards thinking about how we can do that in the best way.

The Watford Helps partnership has shown what we can do when we work together. Over 1,700 volunteers have stepped forward, and together with Watford Borough Council staff we have made over 7,000 calls to keep in touch with our most vulnerable residents, helping them to resolve their issues and being a listening ear. Our fantastic Watford volunteers have collected over 400 prescriptions and delivered over 7 tonnes of food and PPE.

People have been magnificently generous and through the hard work of local fundraising done through sponsored walks, cycling, raffles and more, together we've raised more than £155,000 for the Watford Covid appeal. Already, more than £130,000 of our Community Fund has been distributed through our partners at Watford and Three Rivers Trust to more than forty voluntary and community groups doing urgent and important work across the town.

We want to work even more closely with the voluntary and community sector to build a resilient community where people support each other. In our Watford Together plan we promised to build upon the success of our Watford Helps initiative and harness the community spirit established during the Covid-19 crisis to work in partnership with charitable, community and voluntary organisations focused on helping our vulnerable residents live healthy, happy and independent lives. This Strategy is a step towards making this a reality.

We would like to thank everyone whose views and recommendations have helped to shape our plans. We very much value the insights and expertise of our community partners, and we look forward to working with them to turn this Voluntary and Community Strategy into action.

Councillor Karen Collett,

Deputy Mayor and Portfolio Holder for Community

Recommendations At A Glance [click to jump to section]

Post-Covid Recovery and Renewal

1. [Review the Watford Helps triage and referral processes, to clarify the complementary roles of all signposting/social prescribing bodies, i.e. Watford Helps, 'HertsHelp', the W3RT Wellbeing Hub, Watford's Healthy Hub, HCNS, Watford Together, Neighbours Together, etc.](#)
2. [Ensure that partners at Hertfordshire County Council-commissioned service 'HertsHelp' have accessible local information to support Watford residents effectively, and ease local services.](#)
3. [Consider how to work towards a long-term town-wide strategic approach to respond specifically to issues of social isolation and mental health in the community.](#)
4. [Build on best practice in the VCS to tackle digital isolation as part of the Council's Road to Renewal plan.](#)
5. [Work with W3RT to create and share accessibly a collection of case studies with innovations and best practices, developed in response to Covid-19, from the Voluntary and Community Sector.](#)

Engaging Volunteers

6. [Review the Watford Helps volunteer brokerage system, to clarify the complementary roles of all volunteering services which Watford residents might access, including 'TeamHerts Volunteering', do-it.org and W3RT.](#)
7. [Ensure that partners at Hertfordshire County Council-commissioned service 'TeamHerts Volunteering' have accessible local information to efficiently help Watford residents, and ease local services.](#)
8. [Ensure that there is a formal process for volunteer referrals to organisations to ensure both skills and motivations are considered, and that engagement information is captured.](#)
9. [Coordinate approaches for the recognition of volunteers by the Council and other partners in the community.](#)
10. [Build on the response to the Covid-19 crisis as a basis to change attitudes to support the most vulnerable in society, by building opportunities for professional development and long-term volunteering such as trusteeship.](#)

Diversifying Funding

11. [Review the Watford Helps Community Fund, to clarify its role in relation to similar funds, such as HCF's Coronavirus Relief Fund and WCH's Community Development Fund.](#)
12. [Ensure that the administration of a revised Community Fund is done as collaboratively and transparently as possible. Consider support from a range of partners on this such as Hertfordshire Community Foundation.](#)
13. [Consider aligning Community Fund grants more closely to strategic priorities.](#)
14. [Consider allocating part of the Community Fund to projects lasting more than 12 months.](#)
15. [Align reporting schedules of all Watford Borough Council 'Business-As-Usual' expenditure with the Voluntary and Community Sector to ensure strategic priorities are considered.](#)
16. [Consider a full-time fundraising post, to support the Community Fund and VCS groups through the CVS.](#)
17. [Consider how to explicitly support the Voluntary and Community Sector to build financial resilience and diversify income streams alongside traditional fundraising.](#)

Information Sharing

18. [Review the Watford Helps networks, clarifying the roles of groups such as the Mayor's Volunteering Planning Group in line with the One Watford review due in December. Ensure that there is scope across Watford for VCS leaders to input to both operational and strategic discussions and decision-making.](#)
19. [Review principles of CVS approach so as to minimise any possible conflicts of interest between W3RT's support to its members and its role as a service delivery organisation.](#)
20. [Review the CVS staffing role at W3RT to ensure more WBC input with regards to strategic and operational responsibilities, with the aim to encourage long-term staff who can build up strong local knowledge and relationships.](#)
21. [Consider how to support VCS with collection, analysis and data sharing on changing needs across Watford, as part of wider approach by WBC and statutory partners.](#)
22. [Consider the groupings and 'themes' used to categorise VCS organisations as a means to link new and emerging groups to those with similar aims.](#)
23. [Refresh the CVS' KPIs on actively engaging with business so as to lay out explicit plans on how to share knowledge and skills between local businesses and the VCS.](#)
24. [Work with W3RT to create a proactive action plan to better engage with all parts of the Voluntary and Community Sector, particularly those that support underrepresented communities including those from BAME communities and those smaller groups that may not have their own physical spaces.](#)



1 Post-Covid Recovery and Renewal

- 1.1 Review the Watford Helps triage and referral processes, to clarify the complementary roles of all signposting/social prescribing bodies, i.e. Watford Helps, 'HertsHelp', the W3RT Wellbeing Hub, Watford's Healthy Hub, HCNS, Watford Together, Neighbours Together, etc.

The Managing Director of Watford Borough Council, Donna Nolan, had only been in post around a month when the repercussions of the Covid-19 pandemic began to hit at a local and national level. Working with Mayor Peter Taylor, the council reorganised itself into working 'cells'. One of the cells, a 'volunteering cell', coordinate many new initiatives, such as Watford Helps, the Watford Covid Appeal and Watford Together.

1.1.1.1 *Watford Helps*

This was an initiative – still running - to coordinate voluntary activity, encourage volunteers to sign up to support other residents, and to signpost vulnerable residents to support they might need. As part of the voluntary coordination approach, regular zoom calls took place, chaired by the Mayor, called Volunteering Planning meetings. This and other initiatives meant that groups which might not have worked closely at an operational level before began to do so, from foodbanks to faith groups to registered charities to residents' groups. This "resulted in new partnerships forming and a collective effort to make sure those most in need get help" according to a report by the LGA on the Council's response to the situation. The partnership working was an explicit aim from the beginning, as shown by a quote from Donna Nolan in the same report by the LGA: "The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the pivotal role district and borough councils play in leading and coordinating their areas at a time of emergency. Our strength comes from working alongside and understanding our communities as well as our ability to mobilise quickly and adapt to fast changing situations."ⁱ

The volunteer support and signposting roles of Watford Help were complemented by two existing services already commissioned by Hertfordshire County Council, 'TeamHerts Volunteering' (supporting volunteers), and 'HertsHelp' (a signposting and support service). Much of the work in these two areas was supported by the Watford and Three Rivers Trust, an organisation commissioned by Watford Borough Council to provide a CVS function for the town. They established a Wellbeing Hub which played a key role in supporting vulnerable residents. Staff from some of the non-CVS projects which closed during this time, such as Getting Together, were redeployed to this new Wellbeing Hub to cope with the increase in workload. It is worth noting that internally this caused some staffing changes and restructuring. Several participants who spoke to the report's author highlighted issues of capacity, and questioned the sustainability of this effort, especially in light of the fact that many paused programmes are now beginning again.

1.1.1.2 *Watford Together*

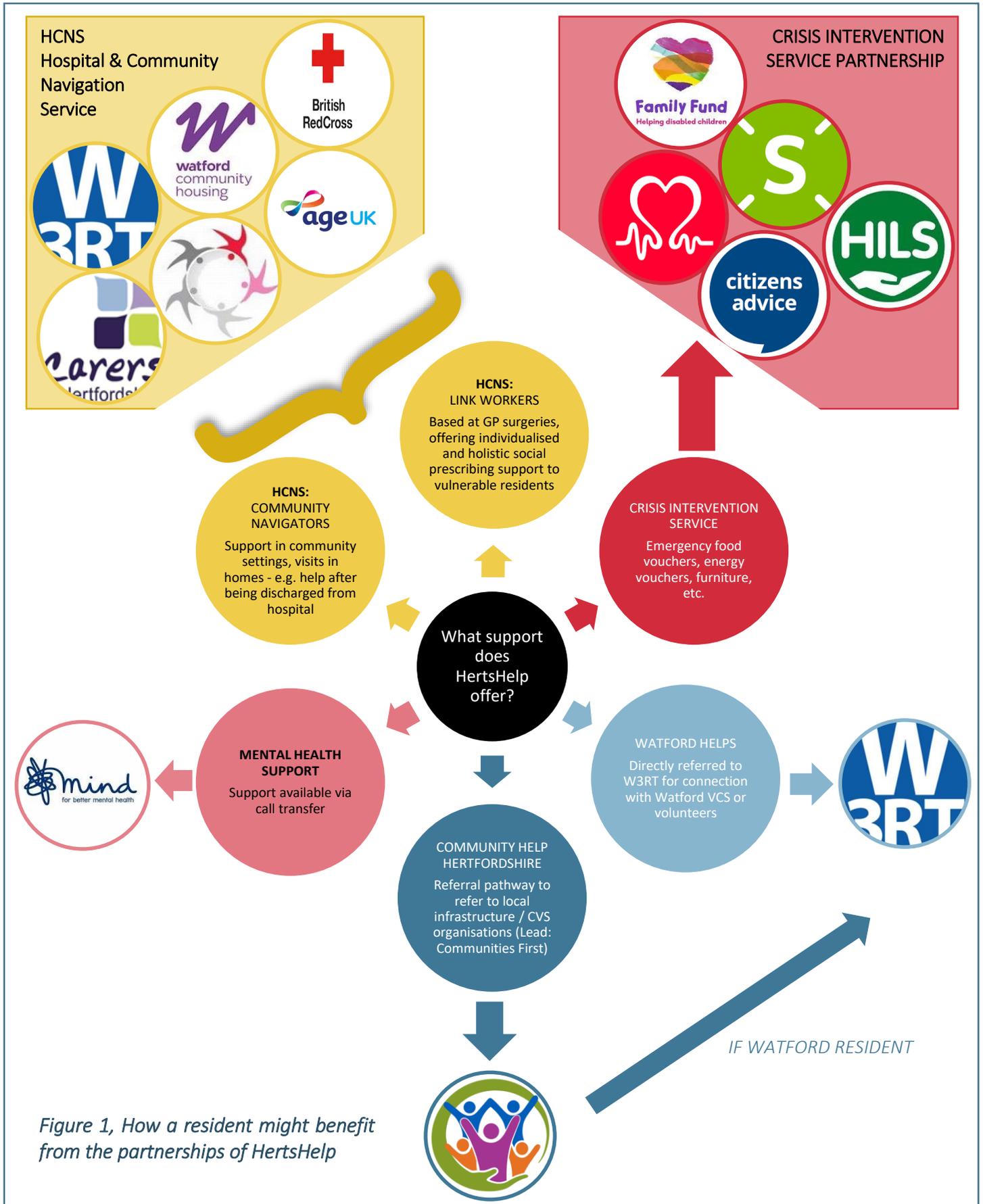
Government guidance on social distance, particularly during lockdown, presented particular challenges for the arts and entertainment sector, with public events almost immediately put on hold. Watford Palace Theatre, for example, closed for many months, but is now slowly reopening. However, Watford Borough Council recognised that cultural and heritage partners help to boost community spirit, and a new initiative, Watford Together, was created to do this. Activities have included One Town, One Book virtual book-club sessions and a writing workshop, aimed at bringing the borough together through a love of reading.

1.1.1.3 *TeamHerts Volunteering*

TeamHerts Volunteering is discussed in more detail in Section 2.1 below. However, it is worth mentioning here that one arm of TeamHerts Volunteering is the recently-launched 'Reach Out West' service. This is a hospital-to-home volunteer-led service which is operating in the Watford area, working alongside Watford General Hospital and Watford Link Workers (see 'social prescribing' below). This service offers volunteering support for up to six months for patients recently discharged from hospital who may be at risk of readmission, to promote physical resilience and prevent loneliness and isolation. Volunteers can help with shopping, pick up prescriptions, offer some light touch befriending/keeping in touch and also help to signpost to other services which might be needed.

1.1.1.4 'HertsHelp'

'HertsHelp' is an information advice, signposting and direct support service that benefits from many partnerships.





A countywide service, 'HertsHelp' is funded by Hertfordshire County Council and the two NHS Hertfordshire Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs): that is, East and North Hertfordshire CCG and Herts Valley CCG.ⁱⁱ The service existed before the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic to help coordinate support for residents. It has a direct helpline which operates 7 days a week, website and email address. Staff there triage clients' needs providing direct support and/or making appropriate referrals or signposting residents to relevant support services such as help with finances, welfare benefits and debt management advice, and carers' support. 'HertsHelp' works can refer residents on for volunteer support (including shopping, medication collection, befriending, dog walking) through Community Help Hertfordshire (see below) and to an intervention service for people in crisis to include food, energy costs and other essentials. It can also refer on to home visits by Community Navigators, part of the HCNS social prescribing service (see below), who help people to identify and access community support that will help people to maintain their independence, health and wellbeing.

'HertsHelp' has a series of working partnerships which can benefit a resident needing support, as demonstrated above in Figure 1. It is part of the HCNS partnership (Hospital and Community Navigation Service) along with Age UK Hertfordshire, British Red Cross, Carers in Hertfordshire, Dacortium, Watford Community Housing Trust and W3RT. It is also part of a Crisis Intervention Service Partnership with Family Fund, The Samaritans, British Heart Foundation, Hertfordshire Independent Living Service (HILS) and all Hertfordshire Citizen Advice Bureaux. Its partnership with Mind also means that callers can receive mental health support via call transfer.

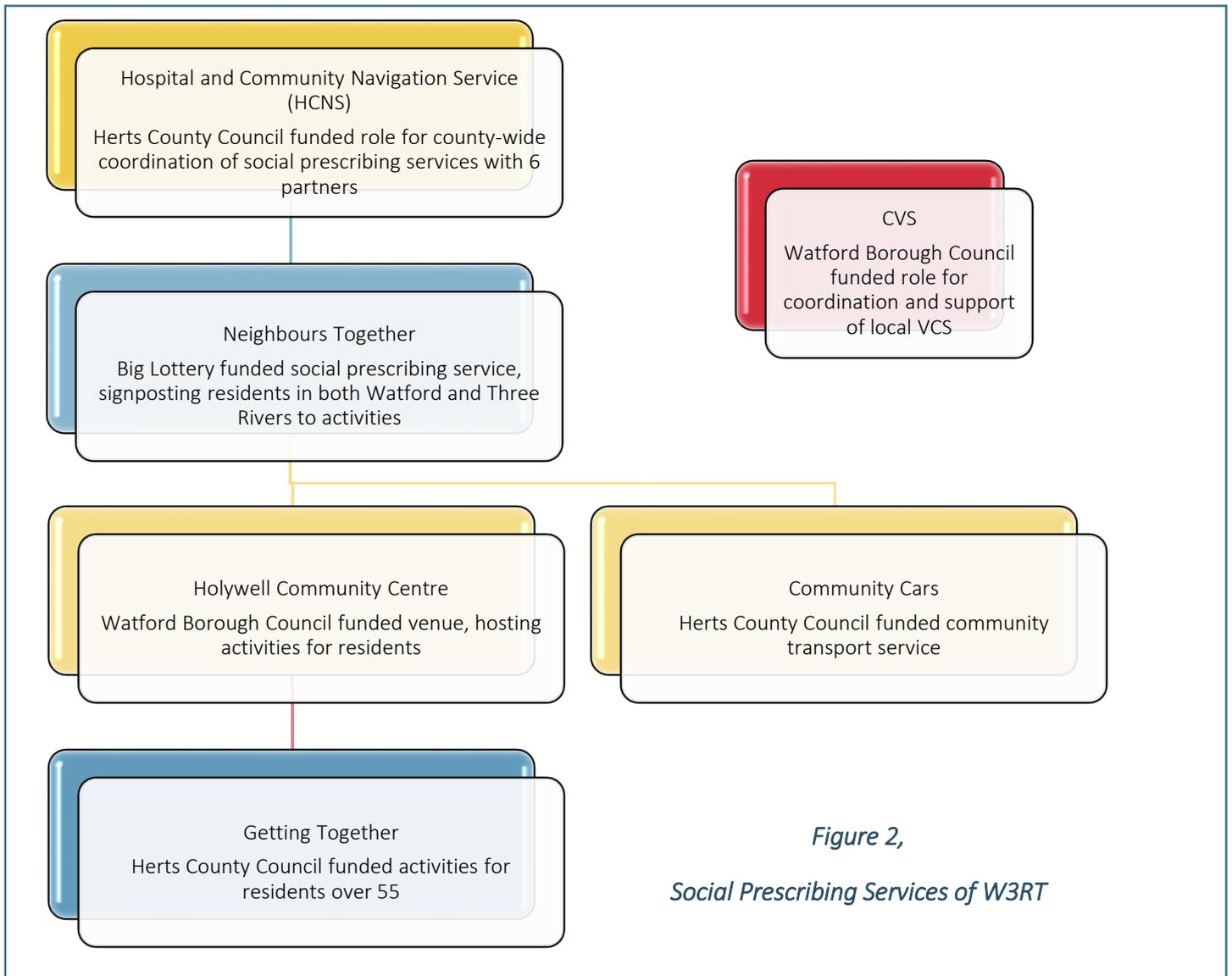
A network of voluntary sector infrastructure/ CVS organisations in Hertfordshire began working together to support local communities during the pandemic, called Community Help Hertfordshire. Led by the organisation Communities 1st (commissioned by St Albans and Hertsmere to provide a CVS service) the network has become a referral pathway for 'HertsHelp' meaning that residents who might benefit from guidance at a district level can be directed to their local organisation. In practice, Watford residents are directed directly to W3RT, rather than via CHH.

1.1.1.5 Social prescribing

The above three entities - Watford Helps, Watford Together and 'HertsHelp' - are only three of many which a resident in Watford can approach directly to be 'signposted' to other support from either statutory or Voluntary and Community Sector organisations. Prior to the impact of Covid-19, there were already various bodies doing this type of signposting either informally, or through a formal social prescribing model.

Social prescribing is a model, often used by the NHS, in which nominated link workers such as those working in GP surgeries can refer people to support in the community in order to improve their health and wellbeing. As the model has grown, the type of roles held by link workers, known sometimes across the UK as Community Connectors or Community Navigators, has extended beyond GPs to other people in the community, such as librarians, social workers or simply trained volunteers. Although much of the legal and statutory Public Health responsibilities lie at a Hertfordshire County Council, rather than Watford Borough Council, level, the work done by social prescribers will be key to Post Covid Recovery and Renewal at a local level. Indeed, those who are closely connected to the community are not only able to offer support to residents, but also share information to Public Health officials. The Public Health Director of Walsall Council has spoken about working with community associations, voluntary sector bodies, housing groups, local businesses - even hair dressers and gym instructors - to model and champion good practice on social distancing and engage with NHS Test and Trace, including calling round to share news on local positive tests.ⁱⁱⁱ

The work of community leaders and well-connected social prescribers therefore remains vital, and for this reason it is recommended here that the Council and other partners work in closer collaboration on this issue. It is particularly relevant in Watford because Watford and Three Rivers Trust (W3RT) carry out a variety of services in this area alongside their commissioned CVS role. This is why W3RT has two separate websites: <https://w3rt.org/> and <https://www.mywellbeing.community/>. A couple of participants who engaged with the author of this report questioned the reason for the different websites, suggesting that the latter does somewhat duplicate the work of 'HertsHelp' and may offer a layer of confusion for residents seeking help. The new Communications Officer at W3RT has clarified that the former is primarily to offer information to Voluntary and Community (VCS) groups, and the latter is for residents themselves. Since the work of W3RT is multi-layered, a diagram has been included below for clarity.



*Figure 2,
Social Prescribing Services of W3RT*

1.2 Ensure that partners at Hertfordshire County Council-commissioned service ‘HertsHelp’ have accessible local information to support Watford residents effectively, and ease local services

A poll carried out in June by the NHS Confederation’s Health and Care Women Leaders Network showed that 72% of respondents believed their job was having a greater negative impact than usual on their mental wellbeing as a result of Covid-19, while 52% said the same for their physical health.^{iv} Although of course staff who work directly in health services are currently in highly stressful situations, it is not unlikely that colleagues in the Voluntary and Community Sector working with vulnerable people, and an increased workload over a long period, might also be at risk of burnout.

This is one of the reasons that many organisations who have been approached for support have attempted to signpost residents to longer-term or more specialised support – in order to create some community resilience. Many groups spoke about their concerns that groups already vulnerable are becoming more so through isolation, and though they do not turn them away they hope to encourage them to find other means of support, for example, asking if friends or family might be able to support them. The balance is a difficult one. In Watford, various VCS organisations such as Sewa Day and One Vision have created leaflets which they put into their food packs. The leaflets have details of helplines and information for residents, for example with benefits advice or mental health support.



Despite these creative solutions, as the situation created by the Covid-19 pandemic may continue for many months to come, many local organisations, such as W3RT who run a recently set-up Wellbeing Hub, may need to assess whether the support and service they offer is sustainable. It is for this reason that this recommendation - to make better use of existing services such as ‘HertsHelp’ – is a key one.

‘HertsHelp’ is discussed in more detail above (Section 1.1.1.3) and is delivered in partnership with many other Voluntary and Community organisations. Its lead organisation is POhWER. It oversees the Hertfordshire Directory which holds the information for around 12,000 organisations across Hertfordshire including non-profit, private and statutory. Around 1000 of these organisations fall under the ‘Care and Support’ section of the directory, of which most are provided by the Voluntary and Community Sector, including many day centres, support for older people, and so on. Callers to ‘HertsHelp’ may be referred to W3RT if there is no information about an appropriate Watford group in this directory, in the hope that W3RT will know of one locally. Whilst ‘HertsHelp’ usually employs around 16 staff, in the past few months there has been rapid short-term recruitment with staff rising to around 60 due to a surge in demand.

In order to ensure that local demand for Watford Helps and W3RT is managed well, it is important that residents are able to access the full offer of services that ‘HertsHelp’ offers. This means that referrals from HertsHelp to W3RT should be kept to a minimum because the Directory is kept up to date (it is annually refreshed) but also that all signposting organisations are made aware of the different offers and services that it can offer in order to use it to its full capacity.

1.3 Consider how to work towards a long-term town-wide strategic approach to respond specifically to issues of social isolation and mental health in the community

When speaking with groups, many of them spoke – without being asked – about their concerns of long-term isolation would have on some of their beneficiaries. Unsurprisingly, and reflecting surveys done in other parts of the UK, the number one issue which came up on Survey Question 3 – regarding issues where a recent increase in the number of people seeking support has been noted – was mental health. Across is the graph showing mental health support as a clear area where demand is growing according to Voluntary and Community Sector partners.

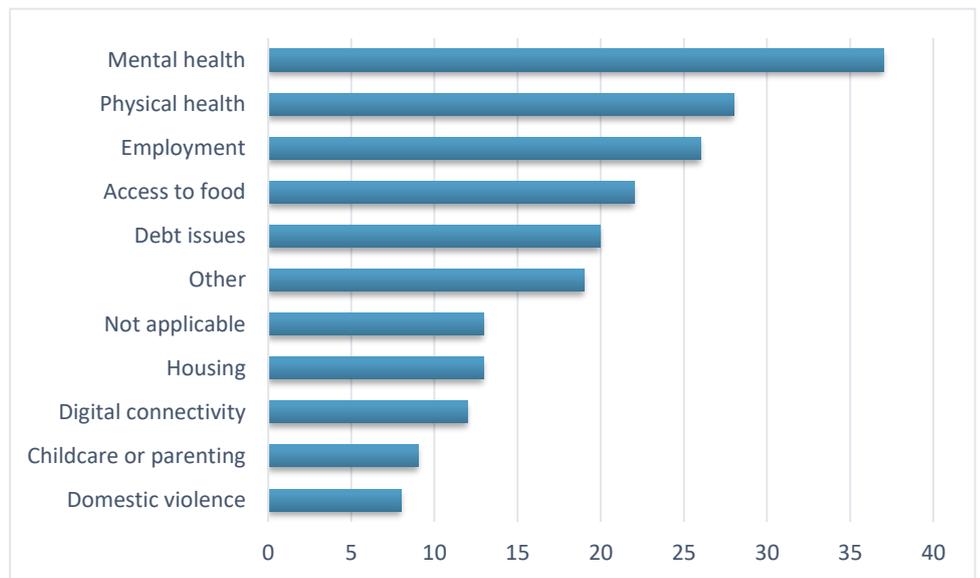


Figure 3, Respondents to the survey question: "Tick any of the issues where you have seen a recent increase in the number of people seeking support (only if your organisation deals with/ sees any of the issues below)".

74 out of 77 survey respondents answered this question, with 37 of that 74 (50%) selecting ‘Mental Health’.

In comments for this question, various respondents also explicitly listed isolation / loneliness and another listed suicide prevention. The charity Mind have said that amongst the general public young people, key workers and people who live alone seen biggest dips in their mental health.^v This issue, along with the others raised, will merit proper attention and strategic response.



The cause and effects of social isolation and/or mental health can be varied and often cut across statutory and voluntary service areas. For this reason there is an opportunity to approach the issue strategically from a town-wide approach. Examples of whole system approaches can be seen in, for example, the Lambeth Living Well Network Alliance^{vi}. However, unlike the unitary local authority Lambeth Council, Watford Borough Council does not have responsibility for all health and social care concerns of its residents. However, one participant praised the excellent work done by the Council and its partners to develop a Dementia-Friendly Town. It is therefore possible that a similar town-wide strategic approach to respond to issues of social isolation and mental health might be a beneficial approach.

As part of the Healthy Hubs initiative in Hertfordshire, Watford opened its Healthy Hub virtually on 1 May 2020^{vii}. It involves a number of VCS partners such as Mind and Watford's Women's Centre. Developing and promoting this will be important going forward, and this may be a quick way to begin working with the Sector and other partners on this area.

Certainly, as Winter approaches, the nature of Covid-19 as a virus which affects the respiratory system means that there is a risk of increased rates of infection compared to the 'first peak' in Summer. It was announced on 31 October that England would go into month-long lockdown from Thursday 5th October at least until 2nd December because of an increase in case numbers. This, combined with the fact – raised by one participant – that many university students will be returning home for Christmas, having themselves already had a less than satisfactory university experience, means that there may well be an increase in mental (as well as physical) health demands over the festive period. One organisation, Brick by Brick Communities, has been funded to reach out to support the African Caribbean Community to help them improve wellbeing over Winter as 'Winter Warriors'. The focus of the project will be on Early Intervention, Prevention and Self-Management.

This type of project should complement the Winter prevention work that Hertfordshire County Council will be leading on to work with all 10 districts for a consistent and co-ordinated approach to cold homes. The County is hoping to receive a small amount of money for each district from NHS Charities to help local charities support the most vulnerable. This should link in with the longer-term Population Health agenda which aims to create a partnership approach across the NHS and other services including councils, schools, the fire service, the voluntary sector, housing associations, social services and police. The agenda acknowledges that all have a role to play in addressing the interdependent issues that affect people's health and wellbeing'.

1.4 Build on best practice in the VCS to tackle digital isolation as part of the Council's Road to Renewal plan

Voluntary and community groups have been incredibly creative in the way that they have responded to government guidelines on social distance, and especially when these restrictions were at their most strict during the 'lockdown' which began in March 2020 when residents were asked to stay indoors as far as possible. Groups have responded with a mixture of carefully social distanced face-to-face activities and online activities, everything from individual counselling to tai chi lessons via platforms like Zoom. Pump House Theatre ran volunteer-led Watford Fringe Festival ran from 1-31st October with a blended combination of online and socially-distanced events. Their online work has been accessed by over 2000 people. The Watford African and Caribbean Association have been delivering a Black History Month programme of events virtually. Many organisations have used technology systems that had to be set up almost overnight, and staff have had to become up-to-speed with new approaches in a very short amount of time.

Online delivery is of course not without its disadvantages. Areas of concern raised relate to a) accessibility to hardware like phones and laptops, especially where a family is large, (b) access to the internet where the usual outlets like libraries are closed and/or Pay As You Go accounts on phones are limited, (c) ICT literacy, especially for older people. There was also concern raised in an online workshop about accessibility for different groups, such as those with different sensory abilities, and also for non-English speakers. One participant, from a group that supports residents with disabilities, said *'People think the internet solves everything, but there will always be some people that need face-to-face support, or at least someone sitting with them at a computer.'* The issue of digital isolation is in Watford Borough Council's Road to Renewal plan and work is underway in this area.



Meanwhile, some VCS groups have been using a mixture of ICT and traditional post to positive effect. Sewa Day began the ‘Spread Some Joy’ campaign in which they asked volunteers and school children for pictures and letters to send in emails to residents in care homes. These were received enthusiastically and the organisation was delighted to receive responses by residents writing back or even painting pictures. With these relationships established, some residents in care homes began knitting ‘scrub bags’ to for Sewa Day distribute to households in need. This mixed approach works well to connect younger and older people, and may be a model for future intergenerational work.

Quick Case Study – digital meets paper



West Hertfordshire Hospital NHS Trust have begun using a mixture of digital and paper to connect friends and relatives of patients who are unable to visit them in hospital. Residents, as long as they know the full name, date of birth and ward of the patient, can now email a message to the patient experience team, who will print out the message, even with a photo, and ensure it's delivered to the patient.

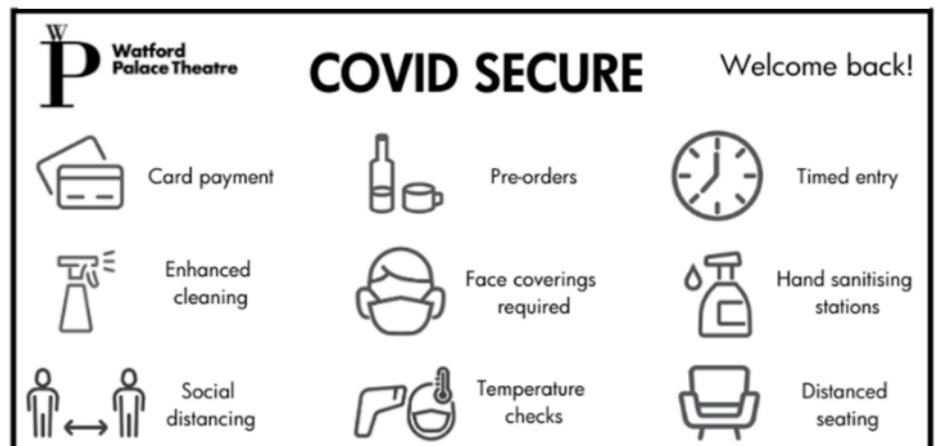
1.5 Work with W3RT to create and share accessibly a collection of case studies with innovations and best practices, developed in response to Covid-19, from the Voluntary and Community Sector

While many organisations have worked creatively to provide digital and online support, many have tried to listen to and respond to the wishes of residents who are keen to return to face to face activities. While phone calls and virtual activities have been helpful to many, some groups reported that they still did doorstep visits to check on some of their beneficiaries. *“Not every volunteer is going to get them [vulnerable residents] to talk. Often they would say they were ok, but it’s only when you’re on their doorstep that you realise something’s wrong,”* reported one participant. Another reported that a serious safeguarding issue was only spotted after several virtual calls.

Another organisation made the very important point that face-to-face services are vitally important not just directly for the beneficiaries they support, but often for the family and carers that support them. Without them, family may be unable to work because of full-time care duties, and also suffer themselves long-term because of stress and fatigue.

However, there are challenges: Many volunteers are older themselves and therefore may be more vulnerable during the Covid pandemic. Others are simply, understandably, hesitant to work in groups during this time. Where face-to-face support is in place, the nature of the Covid-19 pandemic means that transport has become a big issue for many groups, with the risk increased for residents travelling by public transport to day care services – and this is especially problematic for those who might, for example, have learning difficulties and struggle to adhere to government health & safety guidance. In some cases, for example where anxiety is a barrier heightened by the pandemic, residents will not travel to access support simply because the route itself seems too challenging. During online discussions, participants also explained the need for more guidance on the best way to work with small groups, and examples of best practice, as well as clear guidance on government legislation, for example around the ‘Rule of Six’ and other exemptions.

Figure 4, Health and safety precautions put in place at Watford Palace Theatre





Despite these challenges, many local VCS groups have responded creatively to existing social distance measures. Watford Workshop have given their users a pack which includes washable face coverings, with different colours for different days of the week. Watford Palace Theatre are reopening and have put a variety of new health and safety precautions in place, as shown in the infographic at Figure 4.^{viii} The Pump House Theatre too has managed to reopen, helped by the donation of Germicide UV lights decided to kill airborne viruses. The group One Vision hoped to mark a face-to-face 'Harvest' day to help stock their food supplies on 4 October, but with major events limited, they held a Drive Through And Drop event instead.

Quick Case Study – offering face to face activities safely



Nicky and Maria at CathARTic work with many vulnerable residents and have been in touch almost daily with their usual service users during lockdown, but were keen to connect face to face when government guidelines allowed, to avoid long-term isolation. They have now begun face to face activities again, but worried that many of the individuals they work with – such as those with dementia - would become stressed or agitated by being forced to wear face masks. Therefore, rather than dismiss reopening as too much of a risk, they decided to manage the risk differently. Here's how they did it:

- *We worked closely with the venues we were going to work with. We even asked them to provide us with copies of the floorplan, so we could plan out how to measure out social distances in advance.*
- *We decided to set up regular sessions at regular times in order to help our users familiarise themselves as soon as possible to a regular routine, to support their mental wellbeing at having to adapt to changes. This meant we also had to ask venues for their cleaning schedules!*
- *We prepared our materials carefully in advance, planning out who would touch what. We could no longer allow users to share paint brushes and pots, and had to make up separate packs for each user.*
- *We decided not to require users to wear face masks, but that meant we as facilitators have to wear full PPE including masks, gloves and aprons. This is fine for us but at the very beginning of sessions we stand well back from everyone and briefly remove masks only so as to show our faces and our smiles. We find that to be very reassuring and help sessions go well.*
- *We worked closely with Watford Borough Council's Environmental Team to draw up a lengthy risk assessment that had various versions. It took some time but was ultimately very worth it.*



2 Engaging Volunteers

2.1 Review the Watford Helps volunteer brokerage system, to clarify the complementary roles of all volunteering services which Watford residents might access, including 'TeamHerts Volunteering', do-it.org and W3RT.

'Operation Shield' was the name given to the work undertaken by NHS and other partners to contact the most extremely vulnerable in the country and ask them to register their need for support. 18,000 people are on the extremely vulnerable list in Hertfordshire. 'Operation Sustain' was the name to the mobilisation of residents and voluntary sector to support anyone that has been affected by Covid-19, is self-isolating and/or vulnerable but who is not on the Operation Shield list. As of 5 May, over 10,000 volunteers had been recruited across Hertfordshire via the three key recruitment organisations working collaboratively on this: 'TeamHerts Volunteering', Watford3RT and Communities 1st. The number deployed at that stage was 4,030.^{ix}

'TeamHerts Volunteering' is a countywide Hertfordshire service providing information for individuals who want to volunteer and for charities or similar organisations who are looking to recruit and manage volunteers. It is commissioned to do this by Hertfordshire County Council though it is managed by North Herts CVS. In recent months they led a social media campaign to encourage more volunteers to sign up, as seen here. During lockdown, 'TeamHerts Volunteering' focused all its efforts on placing volunteers in roles exclusively to help those affected by coronavirus.



Figure 5, TeamHerts Volunteering social media campaign to recruit volunteers

Watford residents that approached either 'TeamHerts Volunteering' or Watford Borough Council to volunteer were directed to W3RT to help match them to local roles in the community. The role of W3RT as a provider of volunteer support therefore directly grew exponentially in the last few months as part of its response to the Covid-19 crisis. Over 1,000 volunteers had come forward by May 2020. This was a very large increase in the workload of W3RT and no extra funding was provided locally for this. In order to consider ways forward in terms of shared responsibilities, it might be advisable to consider a standard such as the 'Investing In Volunteers' standard^x which is made of nine standards, see below.

1. The basis for volunteer involvement
2. How the organisation resources volunteering
3. Diversity in volunteering
4. Steps taken to protect volunteers
5. Fair recruitment procedures
6. Volunteer induction
7. Volunteer support and supervision needs
8. Recognition of volunteer contributions.

It should be noted, though that the 'Investing in Volunteers' standard is relatively expensive. The website does say cost varies for each organisation but that 'for a small to medium sized organisation with less than 100 volunteers, 1-10 volunteer roles and based within one office, the cost of the liV package would be around £2,205 + VAT.' It might be, then, that W3RT and/or WBC feels unable to justify this cost they might simply use the standards above as a starting point for richer discussions on ways forward.

While volunteer brokering itself may lie long-term more with ‘TeamHerts Volunteering’ than W3RT, alongside complementary digital tools such as the national do-it.org website – which itself is soon due to launch an updated app - some of the areas listed in the Investing in Volunteering such as ‘support and supervision needs’ and ‘recognition of volunteer contributions’ are areas that W3RT alongside the Council and other partners can continue to share best practice on.

2.2 Ensure that partners at Hertfordshire County Council-commissioned service ‘TeamHerts Volunteering’ have accessible local information to efficiently help Watford residents, and ease local services

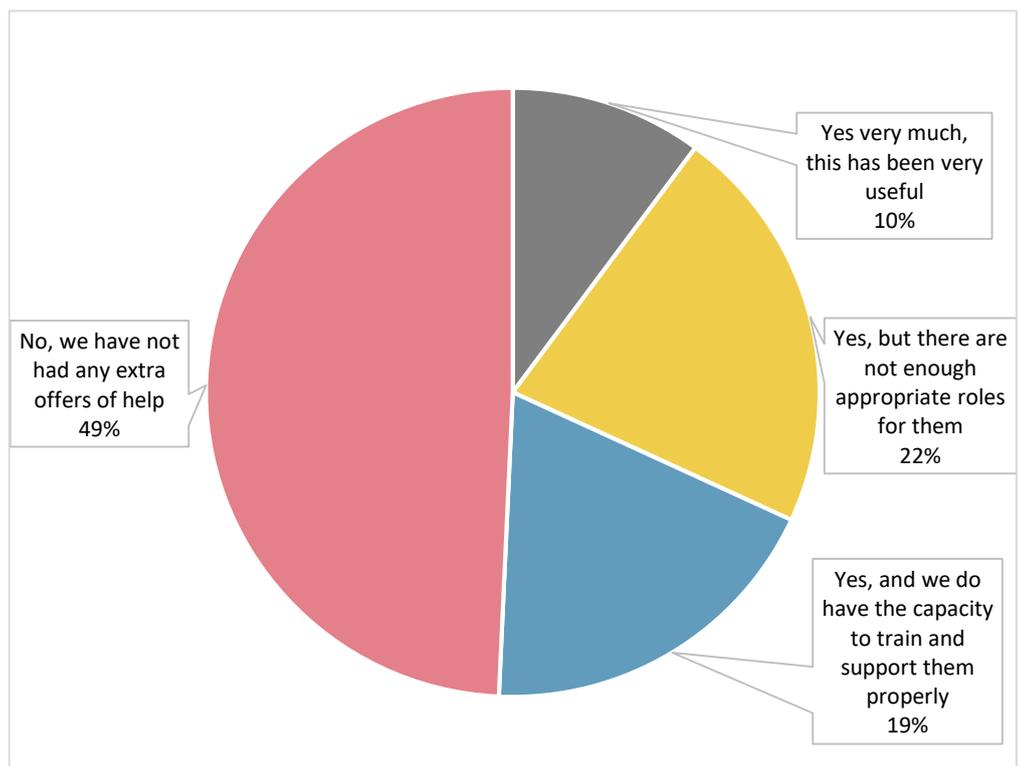
The ‘Watford and Three Rivers Trust Task Group’, a sub-group led by local Watford Councillors who compiled a report for the Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Watford Borough Council, 22nd October 2020, made a series of recommendations regarding W3RT and their response to the Covid situation. One recommendation was that “W3RT should ensure that connections with local partners and statutory bodies are maintained in order to maximise the number of volunteers locally”. Although the focus of the Task Group was W3RT, it would be advisable for all bodies working in this space to strengthen their connections, and this includes ‘TeamHerts Volunteering’, the countywide volunteering body.

VCS organisations reported that whilst the ‘lockdown’ period caused isolation for some residents, especially those shielding, it simultaneously had an effect of freeing up time for others: through saved time on long commutes; through needing to stay in their local area; being furloughed; made redundant; learning online only or otherwise just keen to busy themselves in new ways under the change of lifestyle the lockdown caused. Hence as well as as many more vulnerable residents needing support, there were also many more people willing and able to supply that support as volunteers. (However it should also be noted that many long-term volunteers who supported residents face to face were no longer able to do so, particularly older volunteers or others shielding.)

Watford Borough Council encouraged volunteers to sign up via their ‘Watford Helps’ initiative and volunteer numbers swelled massively. Volunteers were directed to W3RT. Simultaneously ‘TeamHerts Volunteering’ began directing volunteers who lived in Watford to W3RT. Altogether around 1700 new volunteers were recruited in the space of a few months. The sheer number directed to W3RT meant that capacity was stretched.

At first, W3RT responded to potential volunteers one by one, until officers of WBC encouraged them to send mass group ‘holding message’ emails and acknowledgements. One local councillor, speaking at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting, said “I am not blaming W3RT, but they were overwhelmed.”

Figure 6, Respondents to survey question, 'Have you had an increase in the number of residents offering to volunteer with you in the last months?'



One organisation reported that even though they needed volunteers they had to chase W3RT several times, and the six volunteers that they were eventually connected with in June had first expressed an interest in March. However, discussion with W3RT on this point demonstrated some miscommunication: whilst groups sometimes requested names and contact details of volunteers, W3RT's process requires job roles or descriptions to be first drawn up (e.g. driving skills) which can then be sent to potential volunteers, who in turn then give consent for their details to be passed on. If these roles are not clarified there may be delays in the process.

This may explain, then, why despite the large number of residents who volunteered to support others, around half of those who responded to the survey conducted said they did not receive news of any extra offers of help (see above). By ensuring that 'TeamHerts Volunteering' have details of as many Watford VCS organisations as possible, it may be that they can help take some of the load going forward, and will no longer have to rely on referring to W3RT to identify suitable local matches.

As regions across the UK go into local lockdowns, volunteers from Spring and Summer may wish to volunteer again. One participant suggested that the database of those volunteers could be used effectively as a 'pool' to return to, and W3RT have said that they are planning to do this. This may lead to a situation similar to that of the Team London volunteers, many of whom joined as a result of the London Olympics, who continue to be managed by the Greater London Authority and are still offered a variety of volunteering opportunities. If this idea is implemented, W3RT will need to work closely with 'TeamHerts Volunteering' to ensure details are shared according to GDPR guidelines, to be accessed as needed.

Another reason to coordinate efforts closely with 'TeamHerts Volunteering' is to ensure that contact with potential volunteers is maintained, however infrequent, to keep them engaged and ascertain if their availability has changed. This will ensure that some volunteers will be able to be 'called up for service' at short notice if needed.

2.3 Ensure that there is a formal process for volunteer referrals to organisations to ensure both skills and motivations are considered, and that engagement information is captured.

Unlike 'TeamHerts Volunteering', whose sole aim is to recruit and support volunteers, and regularly post individual roles via Twitter and other forums, W3RT are not a direct volunteering service. W3RT has been funded in the past to provide a Volunteer Centre type model, but this has now ended and leadership are clear that they do not want to return to this model. The Volunteer Centre model is seen as less effective than other approaches, i.e. linking together volunteer coordinators of local groups, rather than brokering roles for individuals. That is, W3RT in the long-term are happy to promote volunteering but not necessarily play a key part in managing individuals' volunteer journeys.

The commissioned CVS programme of work at W3RT includes the following outcome: "Voluntary and community sector organisations are better equipped to run their organisations and build resilience and sustainability". However, although performance measures are recorded in terms of queries from volunteers, there are no specific KPIs in terms of volunteer brokerage. Options then are:

- Volunteer brokerage KPIs could be added to an amended CVS Service Level Agreement with W3RT in collaboration with WBC staff.
- A decision could be made to rely far more on 'TeamHerts Volunteering' to coordinate volunteering, with future volunteers directed there.
- Alternatively, a budget from HCC to recognise and support volunteers on a local basis would no doubt be used effectively.

It could well be that a combination of A and B would work well – with W3RT having explicit aims around supporting volunteers (not the brokerage part) and 'TeamHerts Volunteering' to be used more effectively for volunteer brokerage. At the moment the roles can overlap: W3RT usually has an annual Volunteer Fair, for example, which did not go ahead this year because of Covid-related restrictions. 'TeamHerts Volunteering' however had their very first virtual Volunteer Fair on the 30th September, with 10 organisations presenting their volunteering opportunities through video presentations followed by question and answer sessions.

In the future, whether it is WBC, 'TeamHerts Volunteering' or W3RT who are brokering the majority of volunteering roles in Watford, it is clear that a formal process may need to be established. If this can show engagement through tracking key milestones, (for example: date of signup, date contacted, date matched to VCS group, date match confirmed, date of safeguarding checks if necessary, first day in role, etc.) then there will be far richer data to analyse and make better recommendations for the future.

Alongside the milestone tracking above, it is recommended that the feedback from volunteers themselves is taken into account. This can be done via a survey to them directly, asking – among other things - how they were used and whether they felt they were appropriately matched to their role and tasks.

Systems may evolve organically but at the risk of causing delays and issues. In the circumstances, given the unique circumstances of the fast-moving Covid-19 pandemic, at the same as processing hundreds of volunteer applications, W3RT this Summer also to some degree creating the processes with which to do it. Whilst they have occasionally linked long-term volunteers to VCS organisations, the fast-moving nature of changes in government guidelines on social distance, and identification of vulnerable residents, meant that where there were short term or one off 'microvolunteering' opportunities (e.g. deliver a single package) that the organisation was not set up to efficiently respond to.

VCS groups created roles/job descriptions which they passed to W3RT, who posted these on a webpage to which volunteers could apply. [<https://www.mywellbeing.community/volunteer-opportunities>] This sort of traditional matching for long-term volunteering rather than faster methods is perhaps why the new and emerging informal groups and Mutual Aids which popped up on Facebook and other social media channels like Nextdoor often bypassed WBC/W3RT's volunteering channels. They were able to share opportunities in a quick and timely manner, using not just social media but also often WhatsApp. (W3RT did later begin to use WhatsApp with volunteers.)

Of course – as pointed out by several participants – the other reason local groups have popped up and been able to act so quickly with volunteers is because less intensive or specialised tasks, often favoured by Mutual Aids (such as food delivery) require little training or specialist skills, reducing the time needed for onboarding, and short-term tasks – such as sorting groceries in a foodbank – may not require time-consuming safeguarding and DBS checks.

Various IT solutions are now available to more easily match volunteers with requests for help. Indeed the national website do-it.org are soon to launch a new app. Some of these may well be worth exploring.

2.4 Coordinate approaches for the recognition of volunteers by the Council and other partners in the community.

2.4.1.1 *'I'm not a volunteer but...' - Donations, fundraising, special deals*

Watford residents have been incredibly generous in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. Whilst many might not call themselves 'volunteers', those who participated in fundraising for the Community Fund, or in donating food and other goods, have all played a key part in supporting the community. Local businesses too have donated time, goods, spaces. Various groups, for example, mentioned the generosity of local printers offering them free or greatly reduced rates in order to print flyers and leaflets. National organisations with local branches such as supermarkets or even manufacturers have also contributed to the community effort.

2.4.1.2 *The value of volunteering – wellbeing and inclusion*

Many of those who lead smaller organisations, or new and emerging groups like Mutual Aids, are in fact volunteers rather than paid staff themselves. As such, the role of volunteers in Watford not just as an essential support to many of the Covid response operations but also as a strategic lead in many cases should be acknowledged. VCS organisations spoke passionately and gratefully about the hard work of their volunteers, with one group calling them "silent soldiers". Existing organisations have been inspired by the fresh energy of new volunteers, and the selflessness and dedication of Watford residents who have offered support at short notice, during evenings, sometimes weekends, and despite personal risk to themselves (albeit managed).



Equally, it is clear that volunteers themselves benefit in terms of increased wellbeing. One participant said she felt the volunteers she managed were ‘getting something back’ in terms of mental and social stimulation, and renewed confidence. Another participant spoke about the positive experience he had of seeing groups of families interact, including some quite young children, whilst packing bags to distribute to vulnerable residents. Many tasks are also accessible to volunteers with disabilities and the author of this report witnessed the inclusivity of one group’s approach, as those with physical disabilities were supported to sort food. Another participant said they are attracting volunteers from different social demographics – perhaps because those traditionally volunteer have spare time because they are financially well-off, whilst those volunteering in this crisis now have ‘spare time’ because of furlough, redundancies or other situations.

2.4.1.3 The need for engagement

Many groups noted that volunteers seem younger than those that usually approach them (perhaps because of the issues around health vulnerabilities and the Covid-19 virus). One participant said that this resulted in an ‘instant gratification’ mindset of some younger generations, especially those who have grown up with digital technology, with volunteers expecting to be immediately onboarded. Indeed, W3RT reported that there are a significant number who originally signed up to volunteer but have since no longer responded to communication. This makes the pressure to maintain their interest and engagement even greater for voluntary and community groups. Once connected with an organisation, communication techniques vary but informal methods seem favoured with newer groups, i.e. WhatsApp or social media rather than email. One organisation reported having a WhatsApp with 150 people, others with only strategic members.

Quick Case Study – engaging volunteers

Dina at Sewa Day managed to source a lot of food to send out, but needed volunteers to help pack and send it all out. Here’s how she did it:



- *I try to work collaboratively as much as I can with other organisations. This is the third venue we’ve been offered this year! So word gets around. We’re really grateful.*
- *We try to reach out as much as possible. We ran a campaign called ‘Spread Some Joy’ where people could send pictures and letters to older people in care homes. To our surprise people wrote back! We really enjoyed seeing all the letters and paintings they’d done. It is really rewarding work.*
- *I love our volunteers. They’re amazing. I call them our “silent soldiers”. We find them from all over – from W3RT, from other organisations, from everywhere. We also tell a lot of people what we do to find vulnerable people – so emails, leaflets, Facebook – and people hear about us that way.*
- *We really enjoy working together. We have a lot of fun. I’m really lucky: All the people I work with are doing it for the right reasons, with the best intentions, and it means we all want to do our best. I love it.*
- *We’re open to swapping and sharing volunteers. If we hear about another organisation doing a big effort to do something like pack bags, we’ll get in touch and offer to come and help them. Our volunteers love this because it’s something different. And then when we need help they can send volunteers our way too.*

2.4.1.4 Possible approaches to engagement and recognition

Proper engagement is therefore crucial: at the onboarding stage of a volunteer’s journey; during their work; and to recognise their huge efforts during or after their commitment. Recognition of volunteers is important because it encourages other volunteers to step forward. At present this is done through a variety of means, such as the Local Hero Awards, the Audentior Awards, Volunteers’ Week, Watford Borough Council certificates, social media campaigns and more. In some ways the diversity here is appropriate, as while some volunteers are motivated by recognition and validation, others – as one participant reported – are actively discouraged by any kind of spotlight on them and prefer to work in the background.



In light of the special situation that Watford has been through in 2020, it may be time to refresh the processes of recognition and better coordinate the local approach. One WBC officer suggested that one way to align awards might be to have a 'volunteer of the month' and then have a special Audentior Award in which one of these is honoured particularly – but all participants are automatically on the shortlist.

2.5 Build on the response to the Covid-19 crisis as a basis to change attitudes to support the most vulnerable in society, by build opportunities for professional development and long-term volunteering such as trusteeship

Organisations greatly value the large number of volunteers who have stepped forward to support them with tasks which require a relatively small amount of supervision, such as bag packing. However there are organisations whose work requires staff and volunteers to have either specialised skills or to undergo a significant period of training – for example, those groups who work closely with physically disabled residents, or those working with residents with a variety of complex needs like homelessness and substance misuse. Organisations gave examples of how they have been training volunteers in the altered circumstances. Home Start, for example, now have 'remote only' volunteers, and have been offering them online training so that they can support residents via the internet/phone. One YMCA also now have weekly inductions and trainings of volunteers so that they can quickly upskill those volunteers that approach them. DRUM have been using students from West Herts College, who are studying Health and Social Care, as volunteers, and this not only enriches the students own learning but was described as helping to keep things 'young and vibrant'. The students at DRUM were particularly credited with helping with social media campaigns.

One participant spoke at length about the need to provide proper CPD (continuous professional development) for volunteers as well as for staff. The recent report by Danny Kruger MP goes one step further and suggests that volunteers should be redirected as necessary to take on duties of public service, such as VCS trustees, but also as magistrates and Special Constables.^{xi} In this way, the legacy of volunteering could build wider than the VCS sector to help to change broader attitudes and build a new societal norm to support the most vulnerable in society. One participant said in the survey "The cultural tide is running towards individualism and commercialising every aspect of daily life. People do not see themselves as being active participants in their community and neighbourhood." 'TeamHerts Volunteering' is supporting the recruitment of trustees, particularly young trustees, and is linking up with Hertfordshire Community Foundation and others for its Hertfordshire Trustee Conference on 2 November 2020.

This longer-term approach to volunteering (rather, perhaps than the short-term brokering) may be an area that W3RT can support. The Overview & Scrutiny Committee W3RT Task Group recommended that "W3RT needs to clarify its long-term strategy for recruiting and sustaining local volunteering activities". At a strategic level Watford Borough Council may wish to support this by, for example, joining international partnerships to learn from best practice, such as the 'Cities of Service' movement. Swindon, for example, has been part of this since 2014 and has helped isolated older residents to stay independent through the Swindon Circles initiative which galvanises the interests and availability of local volunteers.^{xii}



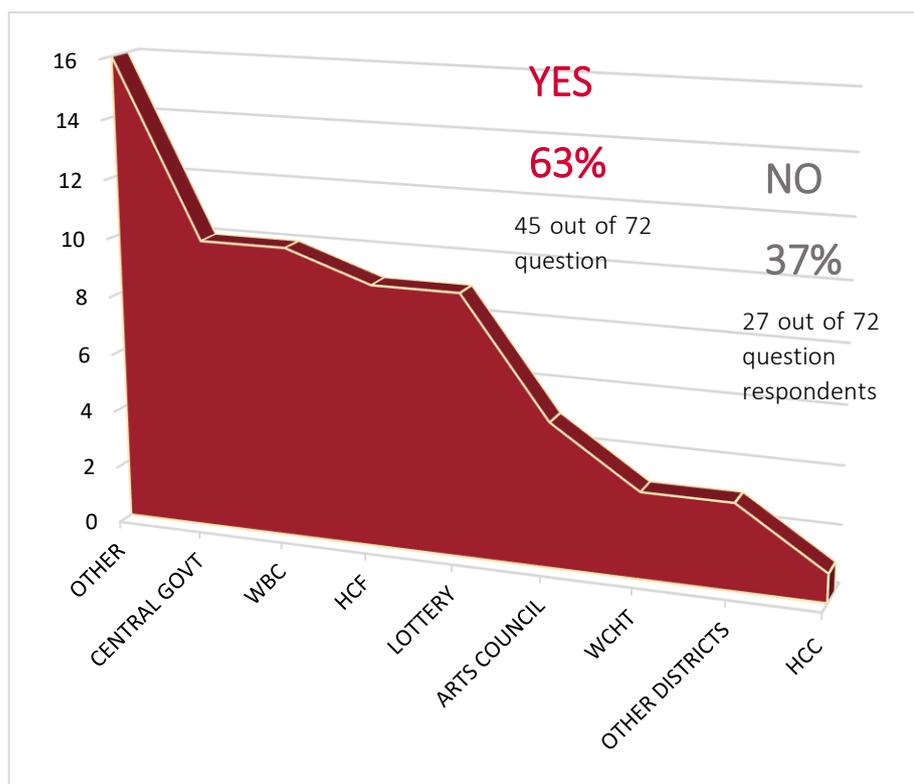
3 Diversifying Funding

3.1 Review the Watford Helps Community Fund, to clarify its role in relation to similar funds, such as HCF’s Coronavirus Relief Fund and WCH’s Community Development Fund

Much has been written about Covid-19 and its financial impact on the Voluntary and Community Sector. A June 2020 report based on research conducted by NCVO, the Institute of Fundraising, and Charity Finance Group, with support from PwC, showed that respondents from the charity sector reported an expected reduction of 24% to their total annual income: a potential £12.4bn loss of income if the average was applied to the sector as a whole nationally.^{xiii} With this impact in mind, the W3RT-distributed Community Fund was supported and promoted closely in 2020 by Watford Borough Council. With a key donation from Camelot (£100,000) and various other community fundraising efforts, the fund grew to more than £155,000. Of this, around £125,000 has so far been allocated to around 50 local organisations across Watford and Three Rivers. (See Section 3.2.1.4)

Watford Borough Council’s Overview & Scrutiny Committee W3RT Task Group recommended that “The Community Fund should be established as a lasting pillar of support for Watford’s voluntary sector.” If this tremendous effort is to be continued, it is worth considering its place in relation to other available funding. Below is a graph indicating – from the 71 respondents to a particular survey question – where local VCS groups have sourced Covid-related funding. It is worth noting that the majority have successfully sourced this type of funding (62%) and of these, the most popular source is central government (10 groups), followed by Hertfordshire Community Foundation, the National Lottery and other Watford Borough Council sources (9 groups each). Certainly it may be worth unpicking which, if any, groups received two types of WBC funding. In addition to this, an exercise to explore the nature of these other funding sources, to better understand how the Community Fund can complement them, will be useful. That is, are the other funding sources short or long term? Will they still be open for applications in 2021 and beyond? Do they have criteria which limits which kind of groups can apply? By carrying out this exercise, the Council will be best placed to work out how to support local groups – and thus local residents – in the most useful and effective way.

Figure 7, Responses to Survey Question: Aside from the W3RT Community Fund, have you received any other Covid-19-related funding? If yes, from where?



OTHER 'Bank', Herts Sports Partnership, Homeless Link, 'Individuals', Neighbourly, NHS Commissioning, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, Resonance, Sports England, Tesco, Watford BID, and 'Various trusts and foundations'	16
CENTRAL GOVERNMENT Bounce Back Loan (x2), Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme ('furlough'), Retail Hospitality and Leisure Grant Fund (x3), Small Business Grant Fund	10
WBC Watford Borough Council, e.g. Mayor's Small Grants Fund, Neighbourhood Locality Fund	10
HCF Hertfordshire Community Foundation	9
NATIONAL LOTTERY	9
ARTS COUNCIL	5
WCHT Watford Community Housing Trust	3
OTHER DISTRICT COUNCIL (North Hertfordshire District Council, Three Rivers District Council, Hertsmere Borough Council)	3
HCC (Hertfordshire County Council)	1



3.2 Ensure that the administration of the Community Fund is done as collaboratively and transparently as possible. Consider support from a range of partners on this such as Hertfordshire Community Foundation

Many local authorities have not directly funded their local voluntary and community sector in the way that Watford Borough Council (WBC) have. By working to source funding from a wide range of donors, both individual and corporate, the Community Fund raised over £155,000 of which £125,000 has already been distributed.

On the W3RT webpage for the Community Fund^{xiv} the following is written:

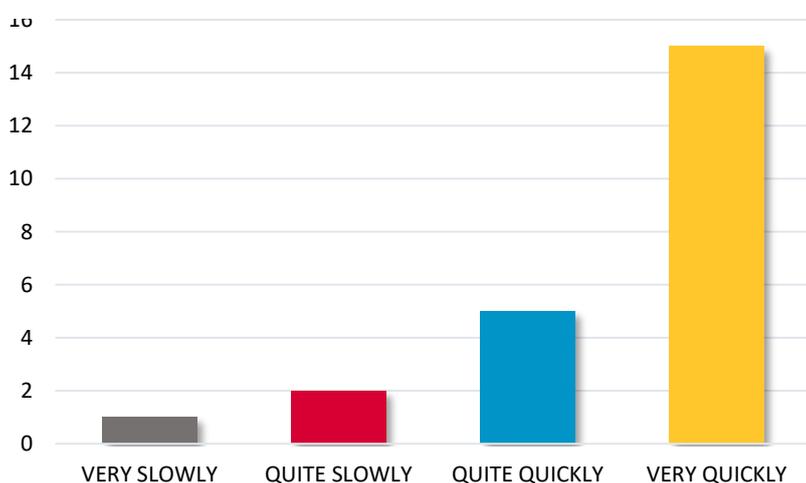
Once applications are received, they will be:

- i. reviewed to ensure they are clear and include sufficient information (will may raise questions with you);*
- ii. checked to ensure the needs identified are priority needs and cannot be addressed through existing projects or funding;*
- iii. assessed to ensure that the organisation is well placed to deliver the activities, will work in partnership with others, and can deliver the planned outcomes at good value;*
- iv. shared with key local partners for comments;*
- v. passed to W3RT trustees with a recommendation to fund wholly, partly or not at this time.*

We anticipate that steps ii) – v) above will take approximately 7-10 days.

3.2.1.1 The speed of fund distribution

Figure 8, Responses to the Survey Question: If you received funding from the W3RT Community Fund, how quickly did you receive your funding? [Excluding 'Not Applicable']



Since the Community Fund was originally part of W3RT, and usually distributed by them, it simply grew this year and therefore continued to be distributed by them. The large jump in the amount of money they were distributed did not stop them distributing the funds promptly according to survey respondents. Of the seventy-three who responded to the question on speed of funding, fifty chose 'not applicable', and of the remaining twenty-three the vast majority (fifteen) said they had received their funding 'Very Quickly' as you can see in the chart across.

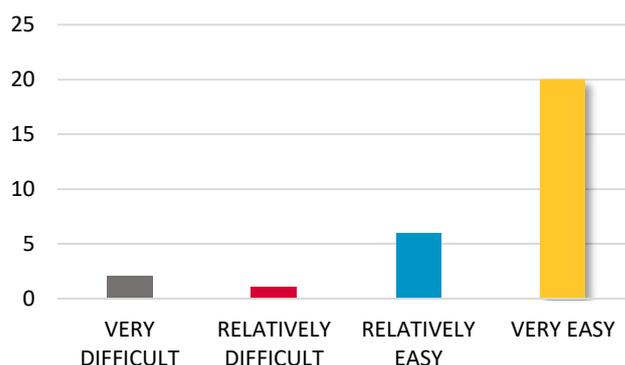
One participant reported that it took 7-8 weeks to receive funding from the Community Fund after an application, which they deemed to be too long, especially given that they were a registered charity. This may have been due to the fact that at one stage W3RT and WBC did decide to ask all organisations applying for funding to do with provision of emergency food to apply around the same time, in order to make a comparison around the same time. Groups that may have applied earlier, in this case, would have therefore had to wait until all other 'food' bids were in. Survey comments on this question varied: One respondent said "application and decision took about a month" whereas another said "Applied March 2020 and received funding July 2020". Officers at Watford Borough Council have said that the delays may have been due to the fact that W3RT spent some time liaising with groups where there was need to clarify areas in their applications. That is, although step siii) – v) will take approximately 7-10 days, the first step can take longer. W3RT apparently highlighted to officers when applications were taking longer and why, although this was largely done on an informal basis. Going forward delays are probably best formally recorded, if only on a spreadsheet.



3.2.1.2 The support offered to applicants

Figure 9, Figure 8, Responses to the Survey Question: If you looked into the W3RT Community Fund, how easy do you think the application process was? [Excluding 'Not Applicable']

Of the sixty-nine who responded to the question on the ease of the application process, forty chose 'not applicable' and, of the remaining twenty-nine, again the majority were very positive: twenty said that it was "Very easy with lots of support and guidance available."



An optional sub-question was offered, 'What might have improved the application process?' One comment had the following ideas: 'Someone to phone to discuss the application to make sure they understood properly the impact the proposed project could have. A much better application form. Proper and detailed feedback with offer of support to bridge the gap. Being linked with someone doing same or similar project.' A phone number and email was provided on the application form for questions but this may have been missed. Nevertheless the idea about 'being linked with someone doing same or similar project' is an interesting one and addressed more fully in Section 4.5 of this report. (W3RT have said, though, that when applications were received one of the first questions that might be asked of applicants is 'Have you spoken to other groups doing something like this already?')

These ideas may prove useful. In terms of making a 'better' application form, it is unclear what this might look like: certainly the form is clear and brief. At only 2 pages long, there are only three main questions:

1. What need is this grant intended to address?
2. How much money is sought and how will it be spent?
3. How will you demonstrate the impact of your work?

Given the relatively small amounts of funding available, and the fact that many groups responding to the Covid crisis may have been new to funding applications, the brevity of the form seems appropriate. If the fund grows and changes format, it may of course be necessary to review this.

3.2.1.3 The decision-making process

The list of recipients from the Community Fund has not been widely published, although some of those funded are listed at the Watford Covid Appeal webpage^{xv}. A list of those funded up until September 2020 is at 3.2.1.4 below. The criteria for applicants' projects is listed on the application form. That is:

- The fund is open to support activities that are 100% charitable
- The fund is open to support activities that are carried out by any legally constituted group. All groups are expected to show that they have good governance and management arrangements and will work in partnership with other groups or services.
- Funds will only be allocated to support work in the area of Watford and/or Three Rivers.
- The fund is to support either: a) groups that have adopted new ways of working to meet the needs of existing service users (b) groups that face costs to ensure the resumption of their normal activities (c) groups that have undertaken new work or new projects to meet the needs of prior service users or the wider community (d) groups that have developed a new service or activity that can help Watford recover from the Covid-19 crisis.

One respondent to the above survey question remained unclear about the reasons that their application had been turned down, despite – as was confirmed in an Overview and Scrutiny Committee discussion – the fact that all groups have right to ask for feedback. A couple of participants shared concerns about the criteria used, particularly around the governance criteria, and shared their perception that there was a need to adopt a certain governance structure in order to be funded. W3RT have said that they require groups to be legally constituted and to operate legally, or that they work with individuals to mitigate risks. It may be that there is a need for more explicit clarification on this last point.



Legally, the final decision around which groups will be awarded funds from the Community Fund must currently be taken by W3RT trustees, but in practice the decision over the last few months has been reviewed first by W3RT CVS staff, which is then reviewed by the W3RT Chief Executive, which is then reviewed again by Watford Borough Council officers or the Mayor, and then finally W3RT trustees. However since the W3RT staff, WBC staff and W3RT trustees might change each time, it may be best to review this. To maintain and deepen confidence in the Fund, decision-makers should perhaps be explicitly named going forward, and their reasons formally recorded. When the Community Fund was originally created around 6 years ago (in a much smaller form) at W3RT, decisions were then taken by committees of three people – the previous Mayor, a W3RT trustee, and a member of the community such as the Chief Executive of Watford Chamber of Commerce. If the Fund is to move forward it may well be that decisions can be scheduled regularly and taken by a committee such as this, rather than decisions taken as and when applications come in.

At present, the Community Fund application form asks for: the organisation's name; charity number (if applicable); name of lead contact; address; email; telephone; website; date of application; bank details. It is recommended that going forward more information is required in order to properly monitor the reach of the fund. At the moment, equalities information is not requested. Examples might include: Is the Headquarters of the organisation based in Watford? ; Is the turnover of the organisation less than £10,000/ between £10,000 and £1 million/ over £1 million? ; Does the organisation aim specifically to work with groups affected by any of the protected characteristics of the Equality Act 2010 (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation)?

Going forward, if the fund is to grow and develop, these processes will need to be as robustly explicit and transparent as possible. It may be that organisations specialised in grant-making, such as the Hertfordshire Community Foundation, might be able to advise or help manage the fund.

W3RT did approach some organisations from underrepresented communities about applying for funding. Some of these never applied, and of those that did there was no expectation that their application would be successful. The need to spend money at pace meant that equalities monitoring was felt to be an extra barrier for groups. However, W3RT have said that will be carrying out a full evaluation of the way they have funded groups, and have also asked Herts Equality Council and Brick by Brick Communities to work with them on their work in this area, that is, grant-making, but also on wider areas such as reaching all communities (see Recommendation 24).

3.2.1.4 Community Fund recipients

As of the third week of October 2020, 40 groups have received funding for Watford projects so far. No group requesting funding over £5000 has received the full amount requested. This in itself may be worth reviewing – although the words “in most cases, we think it unlikely we will make a single grant of more than £5,000 and most will be substantially smaller” is on the Community Fund website, going forward more specific limits to different amounts may help guide applicants. Below is the list of those funded as of the third week of October 2020.

1	Cathartic CIC	21	Playskill
2	Community Learning Partnership	22	Pump House Theatre
3	Disability Watford	23	Random Cafe
4	DRUM Watford	24	SEWA Day
5	Eastbury & Moor Park	25	Small Acts of Kindness Trust
6	Electric Umbrella	26	SPACE
7	Gokula	27	Sri Guru Singh Sabha Watford
8	Guideposts Trust	28	The Bowley Charity for Deprived Children
9	Hand On Heart	29	The Dan Tien Performing Arts Studios
10	Headway Hertfordshire	30	The Living Room



11	Herts Equalities Council	31	Watford CAB
12	Herts Inclusive Theatre	32	Watford COVID Support group
13	Herts Mind Network	33	Watford Elim Church Manna Project
14	Herts Musical Memories	34	Watford Food Bank
15	Homestart Watford and Three Rivers	35	Watford Mencap
16	HOPE	36	Watford Women's Centre
17	New Hope	37	Watford Workshop
18	One Vision	38	Wellspring Church
19	Para Dance UK	39	West Herts ABC
20	Peace Hospice Care	40	YMCA

3.3 Consider aligning Community Fund grants more closely to strategic priorities.

At present, the expenditure of the Community Fund has not been need-led, but in fact demand-led. That is, it has gone to organisations that have bid for it.

If the Community Fund continues, it may in the short/medium term support the residents of Watford as they cope with the impacts of Covid-19 and the government guidance linked to it. However, there is a need to decide whether the Fund will be used for other, non-Covid, projects. If so, it must be decided:

- 1) How the fund will differ from other local funds (as discussed above in section 3.1)
- 2) How the fund will differ from other Watford Borough Council VCS expenditure (as discussed below in section 3.5)
- 3) How the fund will respond to changing and emerging needs (as discussed above in section 1.3)
- 4) How the fund will align with priorities of Watford Borough Council (as discussed below in section 4.5)

Rather than one 'pot' of money, it may be that various 'pots' are set up. For example, since the Mayor's Small Grant Fund is for small one-off payments, the Community Fund may wish to follow the lead of many other local authority grant programmes, and ringfence pots of money for certain priorities – for example, groups and projects which support mental health and wellbeing, or those that tackle digital exclusion, two areas that were highlighted by the local VCS as being areas where demand is rising. Priorities here can be done by considering the evidence base for growing areas of need. Similarly, as discussed below in section 3.4, the Fund may wish to diversify its offer by offering funding for both short term and longer term projects.

3.4 Consider allocating part of the Community Fund to projects lasting more than 12 months

Many participants – both in online sessions and in phone calls – spoke about the short-term nature of funding, especially in relation to Covid-19 response. Although these have been welcome, there is a need for medium- and long-term funding to sustain organisations through the next few years. "9 times out of 10, projects are funded for 1 year only, then the money stops," said one participant. This of course means that VCS groups are limited to planning in short-term financial cycles. One participant said, 'We were told by one funder in October that we'd have to spend their funding by March – but we wouldn't know if we'd been successful until December. Not helpful!'

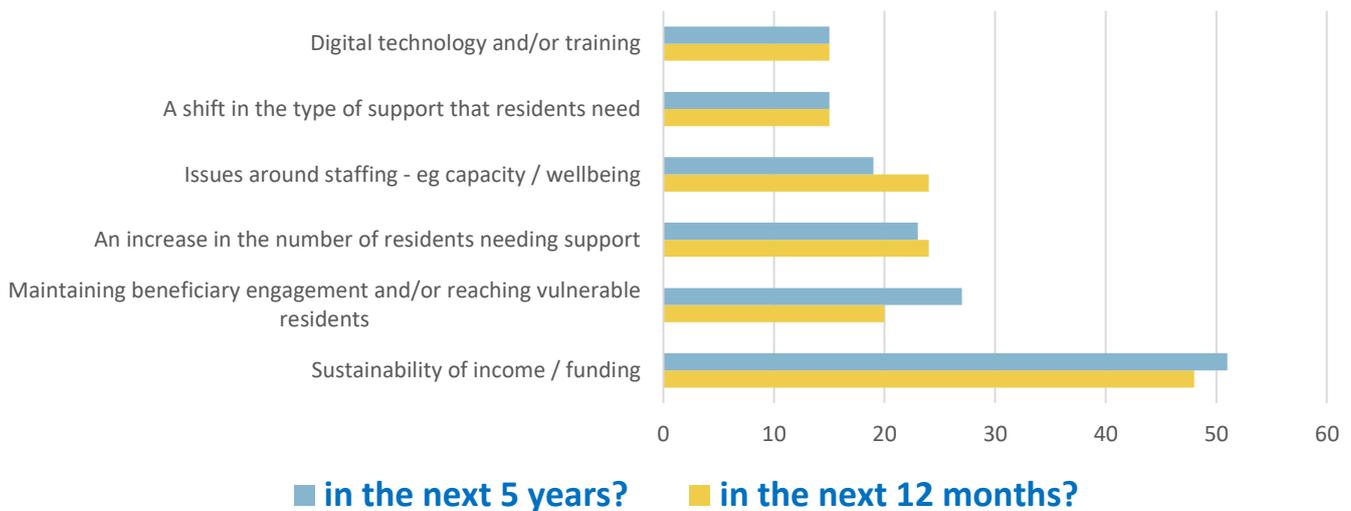
This also a direct impact on the way that residents are supported. Another participant, working with residents with complex needs including those with substance misuse issues, said, "that's just not the way that you change someone's life – you can't give it a deadline".



It is clear that there is a slight competitive climate between some voluntary and community organisations, rather than a collaborative one. The author of this report can count at least three instances during separate conversations with organisations when the phrase “He/She stole my idea” was used to refer to other groups. The emphasis on short-term project funding, which places a burden on organisations to be innovative each time they apply for fresh funding, does mean that groups may be less likely to freely share good practice with each other out of fear.

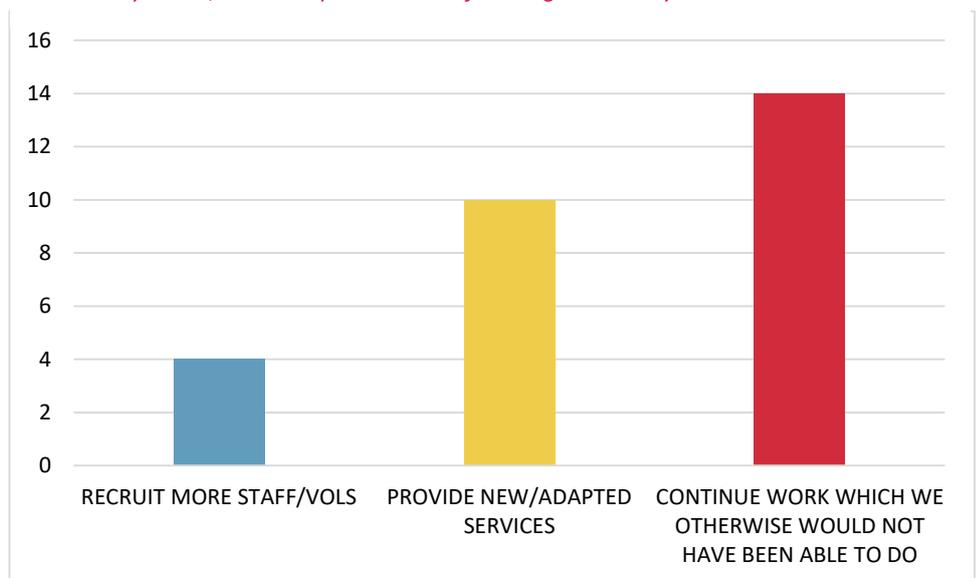
Below are the results in response to the two questions responding to “What will be the main challenges facing your organisation?” – comparing the next 12 months and the next 5 years. Clearly sustainability of income is, and is likely to remain, a key challenge.

What will be the main challenges facing your organisation...



Of the 28 survey respondents who stated that they had received Community Fund income and responded to the question around its impact, around half (14) stated that the money helped them to continue work which they otherwise would not have been able to do. This is an indicator that the fund has played a role not just in emergency and future adaptations, but in simply being able to continue current service as normal. This is perhaps a reflection of the shortfall in income many organisations felt as a result of their usual income streams – fundraising from events, charity shops, group activities, etc – drying up.

Figure 10, Response to survey question: If you received funding from the W3RT Community Fund, what impact did the funding have on your services?



Participants reported that a mixture of both small and larger pots of money would be welcome, as well as funding which covers not just projects but also core funding needs. Many groups stated that funding for project costs did not cover 100% of expenditure and so they have to be as creative as possible – using volunteers to test the feasibility and popularity of a service, for example, before applying for funding. When the service is proven to work, and has some level of sustainability through payment from users, the group might then apply for funding which might be used to cover a piece of equipment for that service, rather than rely on any external funding for running costs. However, this model relies on the availability of volunteers to test a model and where specialised skills are needed, this is not often not possible or unfeasible.



It was also pointed out in an online session that many groups have been working in completely different ways whilst the Covid pandemic has been impacting daily life. It was felt that funders should appreciate the impact of these changes, and accordingly be understanding. For example, many funders have signed to a pledge to be flexible around deadlines and other areas, something Watford Borough Council might like to consider^{xvi}.

Online session participants felt that where longer-term and big funding opportunities might be available, coordination of different groups to work in partnership to create a joint bid would be very welcome. The example of Hertfordshire LEP (Local Enterprise Partnership) came up in one conversation: the perception is that the project needs to be for a minimum of £500,000, and that match-funding is required. It is worth exploring the reality of this perception since one of Hertfordshire LEP's priorities is Skills and Employment, an area which will no doubt be more important as the financial impact of the Covid-19 crisis deepens.

The concept of 'futureproofing' is commonly used with reference to electronics and industrial design, but was used in a participant during an online workshop to describe what was needed for the Voluntary and Community sector to go forward: that is, a process of anticipating the future and developing methods of minimizing the effects of shocks and stresses of future events. When asked what would help them 'future proof' themselves from future shocks, participants always referred to income first.

3.5 Align reporting schedules of all Watford Borough Council 'Business-As-Usual' expenditure with the Voluntary and Community Sector to ensure strategic priorities are considered

Alongside the (Covid Appeal) Community Fund, Watford Borough Council funds voluntary and community sectors in the following ways:

- Commissioned contracts (currently to 5 organisations)
- The Mayor's Small Grants Fund (currently £50,000 a year) up to a maximum of £3,000 per organisation
- Neighbourhood Locality Funds (each Ward, made up of 3 Councillors, has a possible expenditure of £3,000 a year)
- Financial assistance such as rate relief and rent subsidies
- There are also community development projects funded through the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

As a local authority at District rather than at County level, the number of commissioned contracts may seem rather low to those unitary local authorities used to funding organisation who provide social care. However, discussion with organisations (statutory and otherwise) at Hertfordshire level during the creation of this report has highlighted that in fact Watford as one of the 10 districts in the County is actually known as one of the areas that funds the local voluntary and community sector most generously. The way that decisions are made around what is funded and why is obviously linked to council priorities, which in turn are linked to the evidence around needs in the borough. For this reason the discussion around Evidence Base later in this report will be key to considering approaches to commissioning going forward.

It is also worth noting that in various discussions with participants the issue of Social Value came up, and the national discussion on this has moved forward since the Public Contract Regulations of 2015^{xvii}. In September a report was published by Danny Kruger MP which urges the government to use social value as part of its commissioning processes.^{xviii} VCS groups are broadly warm to this suggestion since many of them offer extraordinary added social value to Watford in addition to their explicit services – for example, supporting people into employment through the route of volunteering, preventative support services which ease the burden on social care in later years, and often have rigorous environmental policies and procedures in place. If social value is to become embedded further at Watford Borough Council, either as part of the commissioning process or in relation to property value assessment, participants are clear social value bureaucracy should not become "largely tick-box exercises unable to escape the logic of a transactional system".^{xix}

When the Community Fund was being developed in response to the Covid-19 crisis, many of the local Watford Borough Council elected members decided to put their locality funding of £3000 towards the Fund. It might be that going forward the idea of pooling this fund in order to use it strategically each year could be considered in some way.



Another change this year was the way that the Mayor's Small Grants Fund (MSGF) was spent. The money is spent on a 'first come first served' basis (as long as requests for funding meet criteria). Usually the MSGF opens in April and is closed by January. However this year the fund was spent within one month of opening, as groups applied for emergency funding to respond to Covid-19 demands. The Fund is not as large as it has been in previous years, and the financial constraints make it unlikely that it might be increased. However, it may be that going forward the expenditure of this fund could be staggered throughout the year to ensure that a variety of groups throughout the year are able to apply at various times of the year in response to changing needs in the community.

Groups who receive money from the Mayor's Small Grant Fund, whether £100 or the maximum figure of £3000, are all expected to account for their expenditure, albeit briefly. Those groups who are commissioned by the council and have contracts have specific KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) outlined in their Service Specification which they have to respond to as part of their more detailed contractual obligations. All participants have been very positive about officers at WBC, both commissioning and grant-managing. One organisation told us that they welcomed the monitoring by WBC as they felt it helped them stay rigorous, and that knowing they had kept their policies and procedures up to a good standard – with the support of the Council – was useful to them. Another organisation even complained that the short 'one page' document that groups had to complete after receiving money through the Small Grant Fund was not rigorous enough!

3.6 Consider a full-time fundraising post, to support the Community Fund VCS groups through the CVS.

Money invested in the VC sector is crucial because the support offered plays a key preventative role, often not just complementing what statutory services do but also preventing future demand. One participant went further and felt that the VCS actually plugged gaps. She gave the example of mental health support for children and young people. Provided through the NHS CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) currently has, she said, an extraordinarily long waiting time, whereas civil society organisations are often able to offer some kind of support sooner, and thus avoid situations escalating to crisis level.

Supporting the VCS sector is also important because it contributes to thriving communities. A healthy voluntary sector full of active citizens and locally-led projects is a sign of a healthy community. Indeed, one of the three pillars of the Mayor of London's Social Integration policy (aside from equality and relationships) is participation – that is, supporting Londoners to be active citizens.^{xx} This can be nurtured not only through traditional voluntary work but also through emerging approaches such as via Mutual Aids and Asset Based Community Development.

Participants in an online session spoke about the need to spot a variety of funding opportunities. Organisations who do not have the resource for a fundraising position may not always have the capacity to search the horizon for opportunities, not just locally or at Hertfordshire level, but also nationally. 47 of the 75 respondents to the survey has not heard of the Community Fund – a fund that was promoted by W3RT, Watford Borough Council as well as members and others – so it is of course very likely that information on less well locally-promoted funds may not always reach VCS groups.

One participant commented that, through experience, they have realised that bid writing cannot be left to senior leadership of VCS groups alone. Firstly, it leads to capacity issues, since one Chief Executive cannot apply for the number of opportunities that several managers might be able to do.

“

A basic rule of fundraising is that people donate to causes, not organisations. We need a long-term plan to create and establish Watford as a cause.

”

-Bob Jones, Chief Executive of W3RT



Secondly, it leads to distraction, with Chief Executives falling into the trap of spending their time ‘chasing money’ rather than strategically thinking about future plans for the organisation. And thirdly, it means that wider members of staff are unaware of financial status of the organisation and unable to offer ideas and support as their skills and networks allow. Webpages such as ‘15 questions trustees should ask’ might help facilitate discussions around an organisation’s finances for team members.^{xxi}

Support with fundraising capacity-building across organisations, then, as well as simple signposting to funds and support with bid writing, should be provided by W3RT as part of its CVS role. At present W3RT has only one person fundraiser, employed on a part-time basis. This person was highly praised by many other participants who spoke particularly about her fantastic networking skills, with both VCS groups and local businesses. Indeed the W3RT fundraiser helped facilitate many connections for the research of this report. However with the number of organisations who might be struggling financially, extra capacity seems likely to be welcomed.

The Overview & Scrutiny Committee recommended that “W3RT and the wider local voluntary sector would benefit from a dedicated fundraiser at Watford and Three Rivers Trust.” The co-location of the fundraiser at WBC is to be considered. W3RT have previously suggested a fundraising post embedded within WBC’s inward investment team. Certainly, if a fundraising officer were based at WBC – even partially - then it would help them feed into the strategy to develop the Community Fund and also look at a range of income diversification rather than traditional fundraising streams.

Although fundraising is continuing and there are plans to create a series of points around the town for people to be able to donate contactlessly, this work is in addition to that of many officers. During the compilation of this report the leadership of W3RT offered thoughts on how the marketing of the fund must be developed to create a town-wide brand, and this will require much work: see quote across.

3.7 Consider how to explicitly support the Voluntary and Community Sector to build financial resilience and diversify income streams alongside traditional fundraising

There are a small number of organisations for who the situation has meant that – in the short term at least – they have received funding and even managed to grow and develop their offer to residents. However there is certainly a fear that while ‘there has been a lot of money out there’, the emergency funding will soon dry up – even from trusts and large organisations like the National Lottery - and the future may be potentially more problematic.

During the period of time when government advised residents to stay at home as far as possible, informal online discussions became a key way for the voluntary and community sector to share information via platforms such as Nextdoor, Facebook, Twitter as well as complementary digital tools like WhatsApp. These forums have also proved useful in subsequent calls for funding, donations and volunteers. In organisations where social media skills are particularly good these have been useful as part of serious fundraising efforts, with groups who had lost out money where events had been cancelled using opportunities like the 2.6 challenge^{xxii} to not only raise money, but also awareness about their cause. For example, DRUM Watford used this campaign to raise over £7000 in funds.

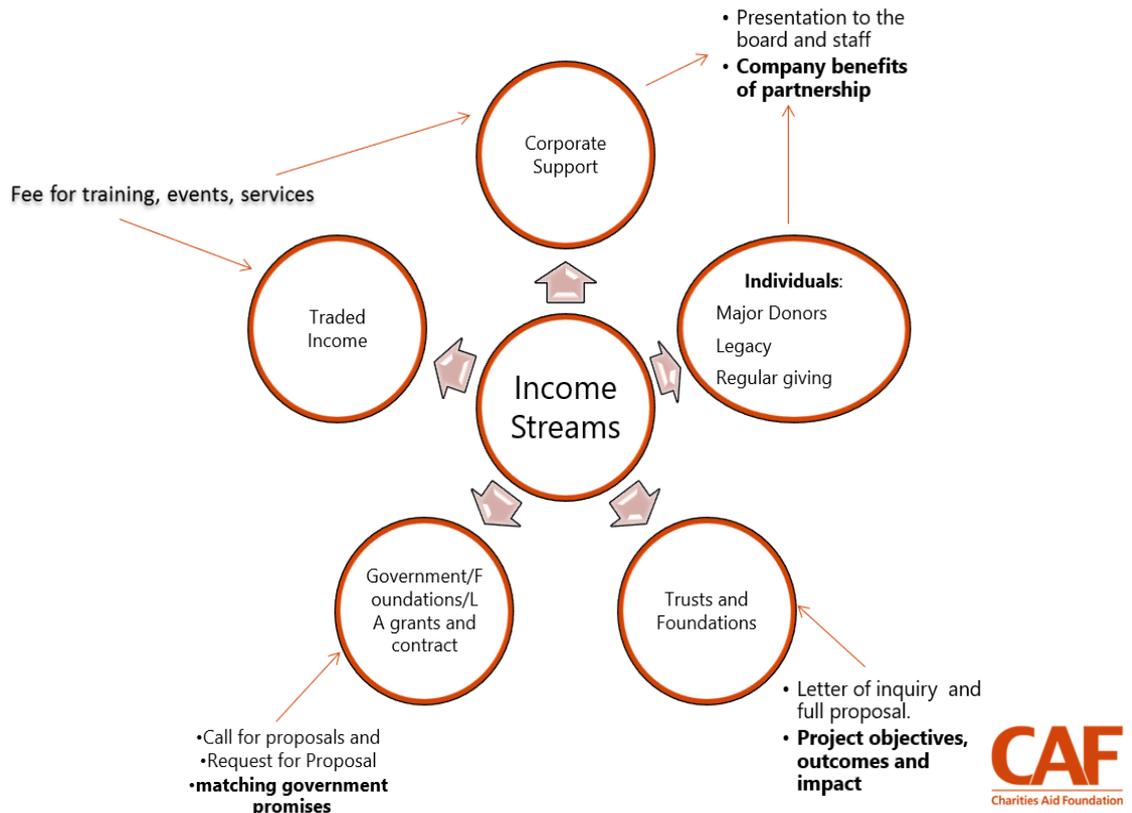
Where VCS fundraising has had to cease, for example, where opening charity shops has not been feasible, or large sponsored events have been cancelled, many organisations have found innovative ways to fundraise. The ability to use these alternative methods, which might not have been seriously considered previously, now too is an added asset for the future. It is worth noting here that the commissioned CVS programme of work at W3RT includes the following outcome: “Voluntary and community sector organisations are better equipped to run their organisations and build resilience and sustainability”. It also includes two (out of five) explicit areas of delivery relevant to this area: “Supporting individual Watford groups (funding/business planning)” and “Working with businesses and Corporate Social Responsibility”. In an online session for this Strategy, there was discussion about the need to look for ‘out of the ordinary’ opportunities: that is, where there is not an explicit grant or contract being offered, but where there might be an opportunity to collaborate. For example, there may be more scope for charities to link with different types of organisations that are able to trade, such as Community Interest Companies or other businesses.



In another discussion, a participant mentioned that they often facilitate educational visits from local schoolchildren, but are required to hire a speaker for this. Going forward, this might not be financially sustainable and there may be a need to create a method to have costs covered.

Support to develop this type of approach – a key one as the financial climate in the UK becomes more difficult post-Covid – is not explicitly offered by W3RT as a standalone project, although the bespoke support W3RT offers can include looking at this for groups, including using the Quality Mark IQ to assess whether their governance and business model is effective and sustainable.

Figure 11, Income streams for Charities (Charities Aid Foundation, 2020)



There are organisations which offer standalone projects to support capacity-building on income diversification, such as Impactful Governance, but these organisations must charge for these services. Hertfordshire Community Foundation also offer a comprehensive course for organisations, but numbers able to access it are short. However there are many other organisations across the UK that offer support with this. The diagram above might give some idea on the type of approaches which might be considered.

Quick Case Study – online fundraising

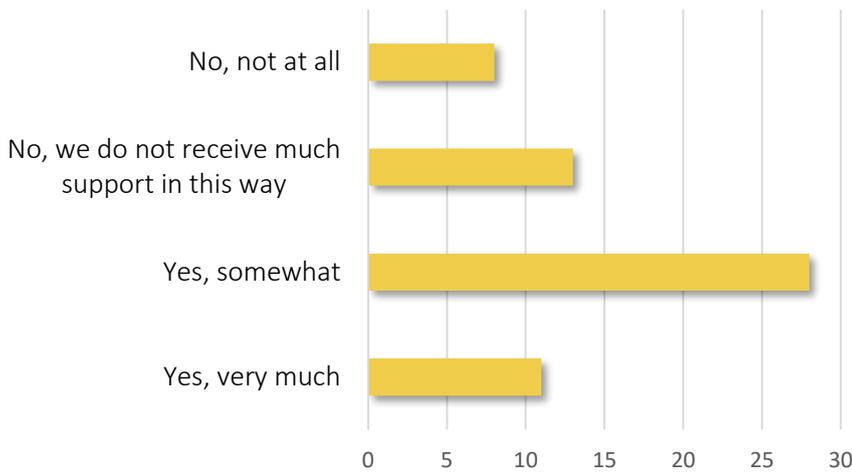
Sarah at DRUM knew she had to think about alternative ways to fundraise when large fundraising events were cancelled. Here’s how she did it:

- We applied to as many funds as we could and I managed to get something from Hertfordshire Community Foundation which has been incredibly helpful. We knew that we had to more than just apply for grants so thought about online fundraising.
- We’re lucky because we’ve got young staff and volunteers and they’re great with social media, so once the youngsters got involved it just took off!
- We decided to get involved with the 2.6 challenge, which was fantastic. Different people of all ages could support us in any way they wanted. We had people dancing in the street (great for them to keep active), people went for walks, bike rides and runs and our art tutor created a painting in 2.6 hours.
- In the end we were amazed at how people responded and we managed to raise over £7000. We’re really grateful and now it means we can try things like this again in the future no matter what happens.



Every single group asked about its relationship with Watford Borough Council expressed very positive opinions of the current Mayor Peter Taylor, who they feel is regularly out in the community, proactively visiting with groups and regularly listening to concerns. One participant said he was doing “an excellent job.” Many groups had been involved in the weekly zoom calls which the Mayor had held to discuss issues in the voluntary sector. Comments about officers were also positive, and groups felt that officers were supportive and aimed to treat them as equal partners. More established groups felt that they knew ‘who to ring’ if there was a problem. Others gave specific examples of support they have been offered – for example, council officers helping to print leaflets which had key support agencies to give out inside food delivery packages.

Figure 12, Do you feel that your organisation is encouraged and supported to be a part of local decision-making?



Many participants expressed that they felt there was not a clear sense of long-term or strategic planning for Watford’s voluntary and community sector. Making Watford a ‘dementia friendly town’ was felt to be success by one participant, perhaps because the lead for this was Watford Borough Council, and it was suggested that there could be a similar strategy for mental health, although WBC itself need not be the lead. Certainly although the CVS as an organisation might be one with a ‘birds eye view’ of the sector, their role was described as ‘reactive rather than proactive’.

In a response to a survey question (below) 65% of respondents said ‘yes’ to being encouraged and supported to be a part of local decision-making. Comments were varied, but including suggestions about beneficiaries/service users being part of the decision-making process, about the youth voice in the council and there were two comments about information being available in other languages. This latter about information being available in community languages was echoed in conversations with participants – not just for VCS leads but also for residents themselves. Clearly there is some appetite to be part of decision-making, but still some barriers to making it fully accessible for all.

In an online session it was pointed out that the VCS were not always sure of council priorities, and how they dovetailed with the priorities of local groups in order to respond to local needs of residents. It may be that this is an issue of promotion – i.e. that council priorities are not shared widely enough – or it may be a question of language – i.e. that the language used by officers and local members is not clear and consistent enough – or it may simply be that the VCS feel that council priorities are not clearly linked to what they are trying to achieve as local groups. Better evidence to link these to local needs based on evidence and data would certainly be welcome.

There are many networks, forums and groups which meet to share information in Watford – indeed, so many that the very abundance of so many different networks may in itself cause confusion. The One Vision project has an informal monthly group that has grown over the Summer months of 2020, albeit online, from around 38-51 participants. There is also a Health & Wellbeing Partnership, a Dementia Forum, Herts Homeless Alliance, Watford Pensioners’ Forum, Watford Interfaith Association, One Watford, Community Safety Partnership, as well as both longstanding and ad hoc groups run by W3RT, for example in response to emerging issues such as community centres re-opening, mutual aids, etc. Since the beginning of the compilation of this strategy, W3RT have also launched a Community Engagement Forum. There are also various networks within the corporate world of Watford, with the Chamber of Commerce also welcoming VCS organisations as members, but also other business networks such as B&I. There are also hyperlocal meetings held by Watford Community Housing Trust which are open to Resident and Tenants Association of a particular area, but also anyone else in the area including local councillors and police (although the perception of their openness was questioned by one participant).



There is a Leaders Forum held at Hertfordshire, however one participant commented that “only certain people are invited to join”. Many participants in private phone calls reported that when they have questions they prefer to use their own personal work networks, by calling - for example – on other charity Chief Executives that they have known for a number of years.

Many of the networks and groups have something of an informal nature. This is attractive and useful for new and emerging groups who need to build their peer support network, but was said to be less useful for groups that have existed for some time and would rather be involved in strategic discussions. W3RT’s leadership group, for example, does not have terms of references or aims, and given that many leaders of organisations would themselves require more than peer support, this may be a missed opportunity. In September 2020, a new W3RT forum, the ‘Community Engagement Forum’ was launched with its first meeting to be held in October. Without clear guidance, some local organisations were unsure how this would complement other existing forums and networks.

One network which emerged during the lockdown was the Mayor’s Volunteering Planning group, a regular group of local voluntary and community sector leaders who met with the Mayor via Zoom online. This is a largely informal discussion so that all partners can share key developments and collaborate where appropriate. (However one group we spoke with did say that, although they were grateful to be invited, they found the discussion too strategic for them and they ceased attending.) There is another group, more formal, known as One Watford. This group is a more longstanding community partnership which includes Watford BID, as well as Police and Fire Services, and has in the best past included Health colleagues as well as representatives from Watford Football Club. One participant suggested that in the recent months this group has become slightly too operational rather than strategic. It was also suggested by the participant that it was important that ‘the right people are around the table’. Watford Borough Council are undertaking a review of One Watford with assistance from the LGA in December of this year. It might be worth considering, then, how these two groups be reviewed together to consider how they complement one another. Certainly the membership of both might need to be reviewed in light of the closer working partnership between the Council and the Voluntary and Community Sector throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. It may also be that while One Watford is realigned to once again be more strategic, the Mayor’s Volunteering Planning Group – rather than being completely separate to this – responds to its recommendations on an operational level, with focussed task and finish groups where necessary, rather than ongoing.

4.2 Review principles of CVS approach so as to minimise any possible conflicts of interest between W3RT’s support to its members and its role as a service delivery organisation.

Watford and Three Rivers Trust (W3RT) is an organisation which began as began in 1974 as "Watford Council for Voluntary Service", or Watford CVS, a local infrastructure body to support the local voluntary and community sector. Its website (www.w3rt.org) states: “*This function remains at the heart of W3RT and we are still commissioned by Watford Borough Council (WBC) to deliver an effective CVS service for Watford.*” W3RT has about ninety staff members in total, but very few of these directly support the CVS role. Around 20 support the community centres, around 30 staff look the social prescribing projects, and another 40 are technically employed by other partners.

W3RT is funded £79173 annually by Watford Borough Council to run the CVS service. Participants from Hertfordshire County Council believe this to be comparatively generous, since many district councils in Hertfordshire do not spend any funding on CVS services. However, as a proportion of the overall annual income of W3RT, this is a small amount - around 5%. The vast majority of W3RT’s funding comes from funding to deliver services. They are funded by HCC to deliver the Hospital and Community Navigation Service (HCNS) across Hertfordshire with other partners. They also have two programmes offering support to older people: HCC funds the Getting Together service and the Big Lottery Fund funds Neighbours Together. In addition, W3RT receives funding from HCC to run the Community Cars transport scheme, and WBC funds W3RT to run the Holywell Community Centre. W3RT does not receive funding to run its other centre, The Barn.

Formally, Watford Borough council commissions a CVS service from W3RT with two explicit outcomes:

1. Voluntary and community sector organisations are better equipped to run their organisations and build resilience and sustainability.
2. The voluntary and community sector interests and concerns are represented to achieve a better outcome.

There are five areas of explicit delivery:

1. Membership and organisation information
2. Understanding membership & creating opportunities for engagement
3. Supporting individual Watford groups
4. Working with businesses and Corporate Social Responsibility
5. Networking: engagement with partnership bodies & statutory forums

Figure 13,

Criteria for the NAVCA Quality Mark

As mentioned in Section 4.1, the CVS role of W3RT was described as being sometimes ‘reactive rather than proactive’. One participant, whilst broadly positive about W3RT, suggested that this might be because as a whole they did not seem to be as active in their role as a provider of support to other groups – i.e. in their CVS capacity – as they were in direct service delivery areas. Around two or three established groups did report that it took them ‘a little while to work out what W3RT did’. This kind of comment complements one of the recommendations of the Overview & Scrutiny W3RT Task Group: ‘W3RT should take steps to improve understanding of its activities in the local community.’

One of the key areas recommended by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee is that ‘W3RT and WBC should maintain a strong and collaborative working relationship.’ To this end, and to assist W3RT with clarifying its position with the VCS, officers may wish to work with W3RT to review the principles of its CVS approach so as to minimise any possible conflicts of interest between W3RT’s support to its members and its role as a service delivery organisation, or where – there is deemed to be none – any perception of any possible conflicts of interest that might deter groups from working with them. Many groups discussed this issue.

One way to do this is to encourage W3RT to apply for a refreshed NAVCA Quality Mark. NAVCA is the national membership body for CVS organisations. It offers an optional quality award to test that a NAVCA member is delivering quality services to its local voluntary and community sector. It is assessed against the NAVCA Performance Standards and once awarded, the Quality Award is valid for three years. There are four areas which the NAVCA Quality Award assesses, as seen at Figure 13. A barrier to this may be, once again, the cost of applying for this mark. However just looking at the criteria in itself may be a useful starting point for WBC and W3RT to shape future discussions.

NAVCA Standard 1: Development

The organisation supports the identification of needs in the local community and facilitates innovation and improvements in service provision to meet those needs.

Outcomes: Identification of needs; Reviewing and adapting activities; Influencing policy and funding

NAVCA Standard 2: Support

The organisation supports local voluntary organisations and community groups to fulfil their missions more effectively.

Outcomes: Diagnosing development needs; Performance improvement; Learning; Leadership and governance; Income generation; Volunteering

NAVCA Standard 3: Collaboration

The organisation facilitates effective communication and collaboration amongst local voluntary organisations and community groups and between different sectors.

Outcomes: Networking; Collaborative working; Sharing resources; Create and promote formal networking opportunities; Record the tangible benefits for those that participate; Use insights gathered to inform future planning and practice

NAVCA Standard 4: Influence

The organisation supports local voluntary organisations and community groups to influence policies, plans and practices that have an impact on their organisations and beneficiaries.

Outcomes: Foresight; Consultation; Accountable representatives; Capacity for influence; Working agreements

4.3 Review the CVS staffing role at W3RT to ensure more WBC input with regards to both strategic and operational responsibilities, with the aim to encourage long-term staff who can build strong local knowledge and relationships.

The lead staff member for the CVS is a key one at W3RT, since they gather and share information across Watford’s Voluntary and Community Sector. Unfortunately members of staff in this role at W3RT have changed fairly regularly – there have been around 3 in the last 5 years alone. This means that while contact can be made with groups, deeper strategic relationships are harder to form. The Chief Executive of W3RT, Bob Jones, often plays this role which – naturally - can stretch his capacity, since he leads across a number of projects as well as sitting on various boards.

Officers at Watford Borough Council often expressed that the role is very broad, and could easily be split between two people. Further discussion on this with W3RT staff (past and present) seems to suggest that the role can be challenging in that it bridges both a range of operational and strategic roles. The strategic side, particularly, sometimes overlaps with the role of the Chief Executive, and these may need to be unpicked and clarified.

Since the current postholder is employed on an interim basis, it is suggested that WBC staff work with W3RT closely on future employment to this role, with joint review of job descriptions, working hours, contract length, etc.

When one local group was asked, what would they like if they could wave a magic wand, they responded, ‘Just to have someone come and see us, see what we’re doing, ask us what we’re struggling with, and then give us a list of people that can help us.’ This is, perhaps, the role of the CVS lead – and one which no doubt is being done well with some groups, but with hundreds of VCS organisations across Watford, will need as much capacity as possible to do well.

4.4 Consider how to support VCS with collection, analysis and data sharing on changing needs across Watford, as part of wider approach by WBC and statutory partners.

Organisations in the VCS work directly with residents at ‘grassroots’ level and so often have a real understanding of the changing needs of their community. In the past few months, groups offering support to residents already knew who, of those they supported, were likely to be most affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, and also how to find out from partners about other vulnerable groups. Newer or growing groups were able to work with existing groups to gather data on needs as needed. For example, the organisation Sewa Day had information and referrals from those who had already been ‘triaged’ from a range of other organisations, such as Watford Community Housing, W3RT, Watford’s Women’s Centre, Homestart, Mencap, care homes and schools. In this way they felt they were truly reaching the most vulnerable. Although

Watford Community Housing does not do ‘referrals’ in the sense of a social service, they do signpost residents to get support. For example, they often signpost groups to Watford Citizens Advice.

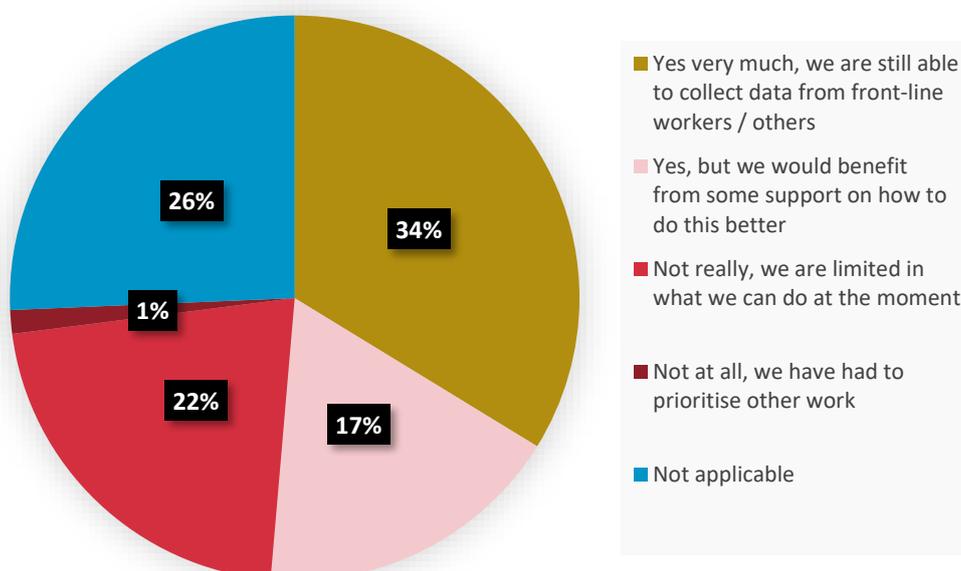


Figure 14, Response to survey question: *If your organisation supports local residents directly, are you currently able to collect information on how their needs are changing?*



However, when asked “If your organisation supports local residents directly, are you currently able to collect information on how their needs are changing?” almost a quarter said “Not really” or “Not at all”, another quarter said “Not applicable. That leaves only half of the VCS who responded said “Yes” – and even then 17% said “Yes, but we would benefit from some support on how to do this better”.

Many comments seemed to indicate that information was not done as a matter of course if funding was not involved.

Comments included “We collect information required by funders but don’t have the capacity to collect other data”, “We don’t have funding to reach out to our community” and “Whilst we have some ability to get feedback direct from local residents, our focus has been on our activities, though would benefit particularly over winter period, having more relevant info & stats to help plan for the future”. Three other comments spoke specifically about recent surveys they have sent out. While the use of surveys is an effective method in the short-term (as demonstrated through this report) there are other methods to collect information about changing needs over the long-term.

As discussed in an online session, VCS organisations gather a huge amount of information from residents. The national organisation Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) is a good example of this – as shown in the March 2020 video published via The Guardian Newspaper.^{xxiii} The manager of Watford CAB told us that the local branch also collects a large amount of data, but that it is not shared widely, partly because no one seems to be asking for it. There seems to be an opportunity, then, to connect or share data points that might help various groups better coordinate their response to changing needs in the community.

Hertfordshire County Council does have a data microsite called Herts Insights, which includes Watford-level data which is publically available^{xxiv}. However, much of this data is sourced by central government data. There is therefore much that could be done in terms of sharing information, but also in terms of encouraging the collection of it, potentially through approaches such as user-led research. One of the best local resources – mentioned by participants in online sessions as well as those spoken to on the phone – seems to be the Hertfordshire Matters report regularly published in paper and digital format by the Hertfordshire Community Foundation^{xxv}. Key trends are crucial to understand so that groups – along with the Council – can plan support accordingly. For example, along with some of the themes discussed in Section 1.3, there is, reflecting a national picture, an ageing population. Organisations that might offer support in these areas – such as veterans’ associations – are not present in Watford itself and might be worth linking up to in order to ensure support across the community.

4.5 Consider the groupings and ‘themes’ used to categorise VCS organisations as a means to link new and emerging groups to those with similar aims

New groups such as Coronavirus Community Help, Watford Covid-19 Support Group, the Watford & Bushey Covid-19 Mutual Aid Group, the South Oxhey Mutual Aid Group, the Chorleywood Corona Support Group and many others have sprung up in recent months in response to the difficulties faced by residents in light of the Covid pandemic and the social distance guidelines that have been necessary because of it. Many growing groups reported that they felt well-supported, through informal guidance, funding opportunities and even the offer of space by W3RT.

The legalities and governance advice given to new groups has been described as ‘light touch’ by W3RT leadership, so as to avoid dampening enthusiasm. This approach – almost of patient tolerance - was mirrored by a W3RT trustee who stated that whilst many emerging groups have excellent intentions, they do not always cooperate easily and their intervention at ground level can sometimes even be detrimental. However, generally larger VCS groups – and organisations at Hertfordshire level – felt that given the urgency of many situations, the risk of funding new and informal groups was a risk worth taking.

Many participants agreed that W3RT were experts on good governance, and this applied when it came to areas such as good volunteer management: i.e. the need for groups to develop a safeguarding policy, to understand when the need for DBS checks might arise and how to do this online, to protect the data of volunteers and beneficiaries in line with GDPR, and other matters. With emerging groups, support on this has been ‘light touch’ so as not to dampen the enthusiasm of new groups.

Participants in an online session suggested though that a simple ‘Best practice document’ could be put together, or indeed an existing one from another organisation could be shared. There exists a Volunteer Handbook, for example, on the Hertfordshire County Council website. Many older organisations in Watford already have volunteer guides and it may be that this information simply needs sharing more effectively.

The nature of crisis means that some groups may only be temporary, or fluctuate in form. The Coronavirus Community Help^{xxvi} group, for example, which covered Northwood, Northwood Hills, Eastbury and Moor Park, Pinner, Oxhey and Ruislip, is planning to dissolve, with smaller areas continuing to work through any subsequent lockdowns as local leads are able – for example, one participant involved in the original group hopes to continue to support the coordination of local section, likely to be called Moorpark & Eastbury Neighbours Together.

Quick Case Study – working with others

Lynne at Small Acts of Kindness has been working in collaboration for some time with a range of different partners in order to get the best possible outcomes for the people that the organisation supports. Here’s how she did it:

- *We try to complement the work of statutory services rather than replace them. That means that we stay in touch with them as far as possible to make sure that if we come across individuals who really need extra support with poverty, isolation and loneliness or digital exclusion, we signpost them to Hertfordshire County Council or Watford Borough Council.*
- *We also make sure that statutory partners are well aware of what we do. We have police officers who keep stocks of our bags with them or in the police station, and we also have bags in community pharmacies.*
- *We actively seek organisations that complement what we do. For example, we’ve worked with Watford Workshop who have helped us by moving stock and packed bags, and with Hertfordshire Health Walks in Watford who help us pack bags and then take bags to distribute to some of their walkers – either for direct use or for them to gift to friends and neighbours.*
- *We work with a range of corporate partners, but we’re careful not just to ask them for money. We are just as pleased if they can help us to spread awareness of what we’re doing or send us some people to help pack bags.*
- *Councillors are really involved in what we do – they have really excellent engagement and that helps us spread the word further.*



It is clear that there is much value to be had from strong collaboration between groups in the sector. Participants said that this can sometimes be hindered by a feeling of competition – especially in terms of funding – but that throughout Covid-19 groups have been working closer together. The zoom groups hosted by Alison May at W3RT for Mutual Aid groups, for example, were spoken of positively by all those who took part in them, since they helped groups – especially newer ones – share ideas and best practice.

However, some participants – both members of the voluntary sector and those outside of it - spoke about the need to avoid what they termed as ‘duplication’ between groups. It sometimes caused, they argued, confusion when signposting residents, and also sometimes caused tension in terms of delivery – with vulnerable groups sometimes even being given conflicting advice or support. One way to avoid this, again offered as an idea more than once during conversations for this report, was to create groups which organisations could align themselves with. These might be based around evidence of need (for example, all groups who deal with food poverty) or by the aims of groups. At present, W3RT has 12 ‘themes’ around which it organises the members of its directory. Therefore below these themes are roughly (albeit imperfectly) juxtaposed next to the 13 ‘charitable purposes’ defined by the Charities Act 2011.^{xxvii}

It is also important to take into account Council priorities. It may be, as was suggested by one participant, that to help non-VCS partners such as businesses better be able to choose VCS partners to work with, these categories could be reviewed to align with strategic town-wide priorities. Certainly, for example, since there is no current W3RT theme for



Environmental Protection it means that organisations wishing to instantly see a list of those groups working in this area – an increasingly important and high-profile area given both national and local commitments^{xxviii} – they are unable to do so.

Figure 15, A Suggestion on How to ‘Group’ Voluntary and Community Organisations across Watford

	W3RT 12 themes	Charities Act 2011’s ‘charitable purposes’	Links to Watford Together Plan
			Theme 1: A council that serves residents
1	Equality & Inclusion	<i>(no equivalent)</i>	Inclusion [Using Data for Well-Informed Decisions; Addressing Digital Isolation]
	“	human rights, conflict resolution or reconciliation, or the promotion of religious or racial harmony or equality and diversity	“
	“	religious or racial harmony	“
2	<i>(no equivalent)</i>	The relief of those in need by reason of youth, age, ill-health, disability, financial hardship or other disadvantage	Access to Support [Working with partners to ensure availability of Complex Needs support, including Homelessness and Mental Health]
			Theme 2: A thriving, diverse and creative town
3	Prosperity & Security	relieving poverty	Economic Prosperity
4	<i>(no equivalent)</i>	environmental protection or improvement	A Sustainable Town
	<i>(no equivalent)</i>	animal welfare	“
5	Community Development	citizenship or community development	Thriving Neighbourhoods
	Families & Youth	Education	“
	Faith	Religion	“
	<i>(no equivalent)</i>	promotion of the efficiency of the armed forces of the Crown or the efficiency of the police, fire and rescue services or ambulance services	“
	Inter’l Development	<i>(no equivalent)</i>	“
	Trading/ Fundraising	<i>(no equivalent)</i>	“
	Other Focus	Any purposes reasonably be regarded as within the spirit of those listed above	“
			Theme 3: A Healthy & Happy Town
6	Aging & Wellbeing	health or the saving of lives	Health & Wellbeing
7	Sport & Fitness	amateur sport	“
	Art & Culture	the arts, culture, heritage or science	A Flourishing Cultural & Creative Sector [including Heritage]

Given the table exercise above, there might only be 7 groups in line with the Watford Borough Council priorities^{xxix}:

A council that serves people:

1. Inclusion [Using Data For Well-Informed Decisions; Addressing Digital Isolation]
2. Access to Support [Working with partners to ensure availability of Complex Needs support, including Homelessness and Mental Health]

A thriving, diverse and creative town

3. Economic Prosperity
4. A Sustainable Town
5. Thriving Neighbourhoods

Theme 3 – A healthy and happy town

6. Health & Wellbeing
7. A Flourishing Creative & Cultural Sector



4.6 Refresh the CVS' KPIs on actively engaging with business so as to lay out explicit plans on how to share knowledge and skills between local businesses and the VCS.

This section could have fallen under 'Funding' rather than 'Information sharing' but that would defeat the very point businesses have tried to make: they can offer more than money. Participants have said that meetings between businesses and VCS groups sometimes feels like 'begging', which can make both sides feel uncomfortable. Instead, information sharing is needed: frank conversations about what is needed and why.

4.6.1.1 *Support with fundraising*

There is no doubt, as discussed above, that groups in the voluntary and community sector will need to diversify income streams. Business participants reported that - in general - they felt that organisations from the voluntary and community sector were not sufficiently commercially-minded. One participant told us that he felt that VCS groups are often not great at telling compelling stories about the impact their work has, and with support on marketing and communication - rather than funding - this might be improved to increase funding prospects in a more sustainable way. Often smaller organisations will aim to reach a particular figure through fundraising, for example, and do so by targeting the donations of individual people, rather than teams of people or businesses. Tickets for galas, dinners and quizzes might be better aimed at filling tables, it was suggested, for a set amount of money, rather than individual seats.

Some participants have said that they felt that the very nature of a crisis such as the one posed by the Covid pandemic means that some groups will be very short-lived in nature. Furthermore, the financial strain which the crisis has put on groups has sometimes revealed underlying problems which already existed. One participant said 'not every group is worth supporting', and that it would be inevitable that some groups would merge or close.

4.6.1.2 *Other support*

Many businesses themselves in Watford, as nationally, are experiencing financial stress as a result of the Covid pandemic. Whilst it therefore might be assumed that many do not want to be involved with charitable ventures because of other priorities, in fact many businesses in Watford have been greatly involved in the response to the crisis. Reasons given for this are: altruistic and philanthropic reasons; branding reasons i.e. to build trust with local residents and for wider Corporate Social Responsibility reasons; staff engagement. On the latter point, one participant told us that they see a clear parallel between staff engagement and their charitable efforts and allow them time to volunteer. The recent report 'Levelling Up Our Communities' made a recommendation that the government make it a requirement for employers to give time off to volunteer, though whether this will be actioned remains to be seen.^{xxx} Certainly one local councillor shared her view that businesses should do more in this way.

It was also recommended by the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee that "W3RT and the business community should strengthen their links." Several groups were positive about past projects that the CVS have run, and in particular a project called the 'Dragons Apprentice', a programme which involved groups from the voluntary and community sector, local schools and businesses. Sadly this project has ended - because of lack of involvement from schools - but clearly the model is a popular one.

4.7 Work with W3RT to create a proactive action plan to better engage with all parts of the Voluntary and Community Sector, particularly those that support underrepresented communities including those from BAME communities and those smaller groups that may not have their own physical spaces.

The challenges faced by Watford residents, and the solutions to them, will continue to cut across public, private and voluntary sectors. While many Voluntary and Community groups in Watford have full and rich community networks, information does not always travel through them easily. For this reason, this section is sub-titled "information sharing" rather than "partnership working".

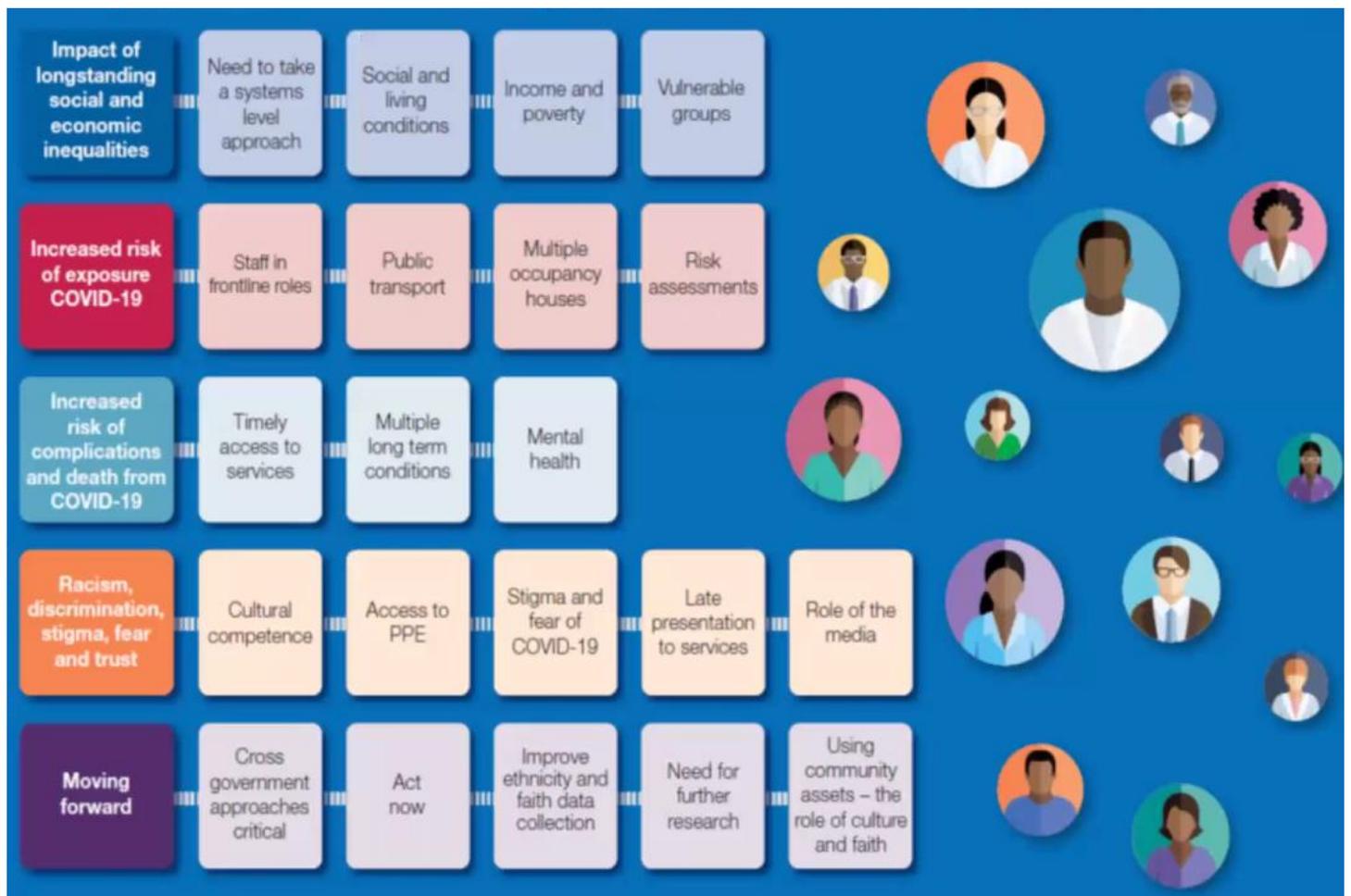
Although one is not possible without the other, the emphasis stressed by groups was not the need for more informal connections, but for stronger and more strategic ones. This would echo the work done on social contact and social capital by Professor Miles Hewstone, who stresses that social integration is best strengthened not through an emphasis on the quantity of connections, but by the quality of those connections.^{xxxii} In response to the question “*Aside from funding and help from volunteers, what else would enable your organisation to support Watford residents better?*” there were 39 responses in total, and of these sixteen of these were suggesting a need for better communication, partnership working or networking. A further 6 responses highlighted the need for better access to physical space, even shared space.

4.7.1.1 BAME Communities

In the survey the representation of BAME groups was brought up various times. Here is a selection of the comments:

- “We need a properly funded BAME voluntary sector infrastructure to support the BAME communities”
- “WBC should host at least 6 monthly meetings with BAME community organisation leaders with a view to listen and take forward actions”
- “A directory of services and organisations needs to be promoted properly in places where community members go and in other languages”

Figure 16, Some reasons for increased impact of Covid-19 on BAME groups, shared by Jim McManus, Public Health Director of Hertfordshire County Council. From: ‘Beyond The Data: Understanding the Impact Report’ (PHE, 2020)



There are around 200 languages spoken in schools across Hertfordshire County. Since much of the networking and communication that happens between W3RT groups is informal, the demographic makeup of staff and volunteers, and equalities training of staff and volunteers, plays a key role in how information is shared – not only between organisations, but also with residents. This is more urgent than ever in light of the Public Health statement stating that there is an association between belonging to some ethnic groups and the likelihood of testing positive and dying with COVID-19^{xxxiii}. It is of course vital that staff and volunteers within VCS organisations continue to be able to work in a safe environment.

Reasons for an increased risk for BAME communities are varied and complex, as laid out below in Figure 15 above. Therefore a variety of organisations – including both voluntary and statutory – will need to approach these issues from a variety of angles. It is also important that a wide range of staff and volunteers in the VCS from a background of ethnicities and social demographics are able to join both strategic and operational discussions. This point was addressed recently in a May 2020 paper by the organisation CharitySoWhite, which includes the recommendation to ‘actively value lived experience in order to counterbalance the lack of diversity in the charity sector, give programmes integrity and ensure their success’^{xxxiii}.

4.7.1.2 Different types of groups

There are a variety of different groups which offer support across Watford. Faith groups of all sizes, for example, have played a key role in providing food not just to residents but even to hospital workers. The homelessness prevention charity New Hope originally grew out of a project by members of St Mary’s Church. The Watford Sikh Gurdwara offers support not only to its own elderly members but also supports local homeless residents via Watford’s Winter Shelter. These services are often vital, and one member of a faith group said, “We’re not very good at blowing our own trumpet; we need to make other people aware of what we’re offering”. Certainly collaboration between faith and non-faith groups could be even further strengthened, if only to clear misconceptions for residents. One participant said, ‘*I think residents get put off because they think, I’ve got to be from that religion to go there and ask for help*’.

Whilst formal charities are involved in many strategic discussions, participants shared that groups with other forms of governance – particularly Social Enterprises and Community Interest Companies – are not always invited to be part of conversations, despite having aims to benefit the community. It was felt that these groups have much complementary expertise to offer and should be welcomed warmly into discussions. Groups of this nature may be able to add to conversations, for example, because of the different types of information they are aware of through being part of business networks. Interestingly, to access this type of information one Watford faith group has signed up to Watford Borough Council’s Business E-Newsletter. (*‘There is information on things like energy efficient grants’* explained the participant.)

Many of the mutual aid groups which have sprung up explained that they communicate almost exclusively via social media. There is a need, then, for a social media presence – for both WBC and W3RT - to be a priority.

Informal groups – not just Covid-response mutual aids – can sometimes feel side-lined. For example, while events in the community are a key way for voluntary and community groups to share information with the public, and each other informally, about the work they are doing, one participant felt that events were not always done with impact in mind. He gave the example of a recent Pride event which had little publicity and was held at the very back of a park, so that visitors to the park itself might not be aware of its presence.

This was a perception shared by some organisations: “Small groups don’t hear things,” one participant said. An example was given of Watford’s Ghanaian community, some of whom meet for religious worship in non-specialised spaces, for example, schools, since they do not have their own physical spaces. Since it has not been possible to meet in large groups for much of

2020, due to Covid-19 government guidance on social distance, groups such as these have sometimes missed out on having information shared across their members effectively. Other groups without physical headquarters have also struggled. For example, the Watford African and Caribbean Association often used two sites pre-Covid, but both venues are not open for public use at the moment. They have been supported by W3RT, who they pay for some storage purposes and also officially use as their postal address.

“ *Councils can continue to empower their local community groups to deliver innovative initiatives, with the question of: ‘What can you do for us?’ being re-framed to ‘What can we do together?’* ”

- Wiltshire Council, 2020

4.7.1.3 Working with Watford Borough Council

Watford Borough Council has many teams working with the community, and though all participants were very positive about the relationship with the council, it will be important to continue to strategically link the various projects which affect the Voluntary and Community Sector. For example, groups might benefit from one point of contact the council, rather than contact separately from the team working on the Community Fund, those coordinating Watford Together activities, or those coordinating the Big Events programme. It will be important that these avenues of communication are coordinated as far as possible.

Watford has many voluntary and community organisations which do excellent work, and local politicians are keen to support them where they can. Naturally, this means that there is occasionally tension between the different groups, with one participant describing the feeling in the sector as a ‘political playground’. However, another participant said that, despite the Mayor knowing of her opposing political views, he and the Cabinet Member for Community, Cllr Karen Collett, were both very supportive of her work in the community, and offered guidance where they could.

Generally participants are very grateful for the proactive help offered by Watford Borough Council during the Covid crisis, and feel that they are collaborating more closely than they have before. This was reflected in a quote from a Wiltshire Council officer, who felt their Council and VCS were collaborating more closely – see across.

As well as participants being positive about elected members, it should be noted that all participants - without exception - spoke positively about WBC officers, with many being able to name several personally and all stressing that they were always available for a call and help when needed.

4.7.1.4 W3RT

The commissioned CVS programme of work at W3RT includes the following outcome: “The voluntary and community sector interests and concerns are represented to achieve a better outcome”. It also includes three (out of five) explicit areas of delivery relevant to this area: “Membership and organisation information (directories)”; “Understanding membership and creating opportunities for engagement (profile mapping/Yammer group/voluntary sector fair)” and “Networking – engagement with partnership bodies and statutory forums”.

Some participants, although positive about W3RT in some ways, were critical in this area. One said: “They expect groups to go to them, or go to their website. They need to go out into the community more.” The Overview and Scrutiny Committee W3RT Task Group included the following recommendation: ‘There is a need for W3RT to build more and better partnership working across the local community.’ It would also be remiss of this report to ignore the many comments that participants have made about the tensions between W3RT, particularly its leadership, and other organisations. These comments have come from a wide variety of organisations. One reason given by participants for underlying tensions is the fact that W3RT are sometimes seen as a competitor to the members that they support. This is a risk that needs to be carefully managed going forward, and is discussed further in Section 4.2.

A final example, perhaps of how information is shared or not amongst the Voluntary and Community Sector, is the results of the question below. As seen, exactly 50% of the 76 question respondents had not heard of the Community Fund despite it being promoted widely both by W3RT, Watford Borough Council and others. Therefore there is clearly a need to work on better information sharing. If something as public as this did not reach all groups, then it is feasible to assume that other information does not always trickle through to smaller groups.

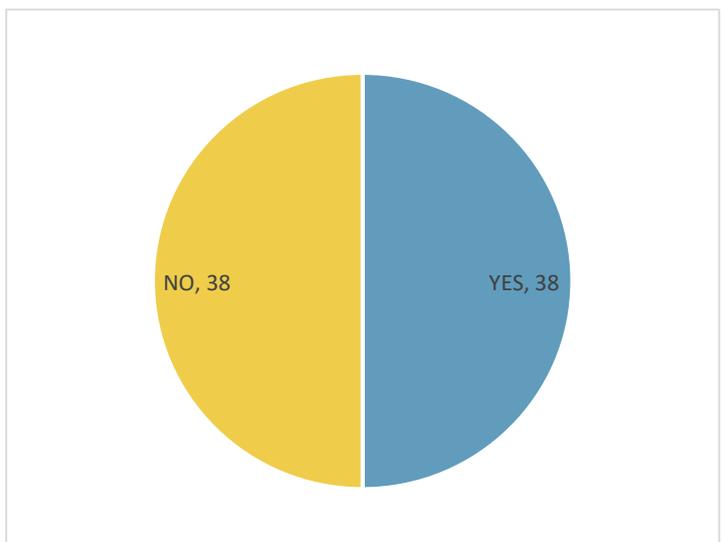


Figure 17, Responses to survey question: Have you heard of the 'Watford Helps' Covid-19 Community Fund, managed by W3RT ?



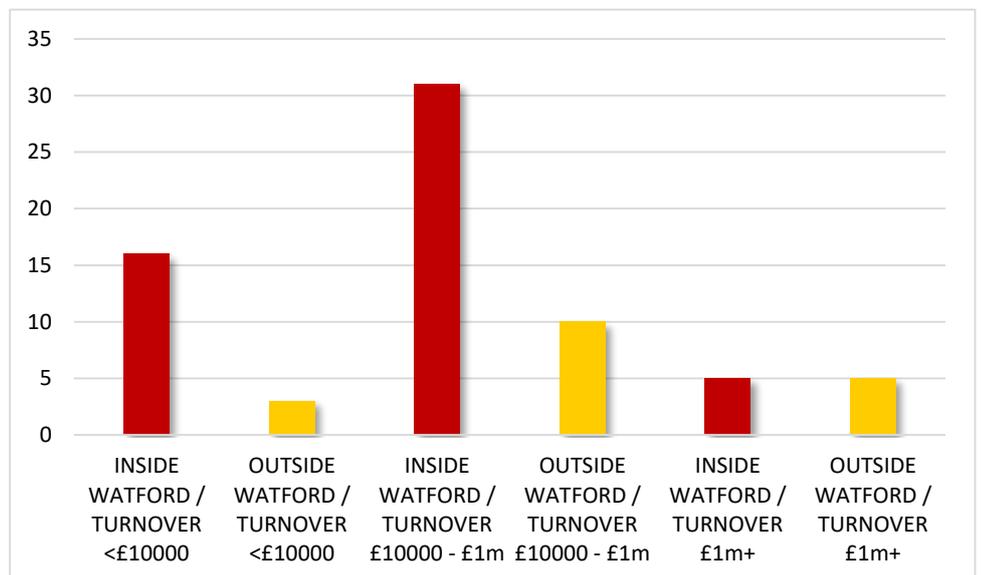
5 Community Engagement

This report was compiled by following a Communication and Engagement Plan which was reviewed by Watford Borough Council’s Communication team, and the following engagement methods agreed:

- Weekly face-to-face discussions, every Wednesday, government guidance permitting (*‘Walk n Talk’*) These were held in different parts of Watford in order to engage any groups who wished to speak informally face to face. These were in Holywell Community Centre (South Watford), Watford Palace Theatre (Central Watford), One Vision (North Watford), The Barn (Central Watford). Bookings were necessary so as to adhere to government Track and Trace guidelines, and to adhere to the Rule of Six guidance. Unfortunately the two Central Watford events were not popular and had no bookings, although this was to be expected in the middle of a health pandemic, but informal discussions were held face-to-face with two organisations in North Watford, and two organisations in South Watford. These were helpful to air some more critical discussions.
- Weekly online sessions, every Friday [this and the above bookable at <http://watfordcommunity.eventbrite.com/>] Four online sessions in total were held, and at least one member of W3RT was present at each. However, again, uptake was low – in total only six organisations participated in these. However these were useful to create the main themes for the strategy and build on key areas to address (that is, funding, volunteering, immediate Covid assistance and information sharing) and these themes were then explored in more detail in phone calls. Each session built upon the last, with additional ideas and issues being added each time.
- Attendance at existing VCS forums also took place to listen to insights and get a sense of recurring issues in the sector. This included Three Rivers Families First Partnership Meeting (which included many groups that support Watford residents), a W3RT Forum to discuss issues arising from Covid, the Mayor’s Volunteering Planning telephone conference, W3RT’s new Community Engagement Forum (9 October), and a Hertfordshire County Council-hosted BAME Covid Q&A.
- Attendance at online VCS events hosted outside Watford helped to offer alternative perspectives. This included the webinar on the Future Relationship between Kent County Council and the Voluntary Sector, the Charity Link webinar on Managing Small Charities in a Covid-19 World, the Islington Voluntary and Community E-Conference, and also a phone discussion with an officer at Wiltshire Council.
- Between 20-30 online meetings and phone calls were held with mainly Chief Executives but also other staff, and sometimes former staff, from various statutory and non-statutory, VCS and non-VCS organisations in Watford and Hertfordshire. These conversations offered participants a chance to offer views openly and honestly.

An online survey was created in collaboration by the officers of the Overview and Scrutiny Watford and Three Rivers Trust Task Group [available at <https://surveymonkey.com/r/watfordcommunity>] Input to this survey has come from various participants, both from inside and outside of Watford’s Voluntary and Community Sector. It was open between 20 September and 28 October 2020 and there were 77 respondents. A breakdown of the type of participants is to be found at Figure 18.

Figure 18, Type of organisations who responded to the survey (70 out of 77 respondents answered this question)



A full list of participants is to be found at the end of this report.



5.1 With thanks to the following organisations for their time and insights

Abbey Flyer Users Group	Rickmansworth Foodbank
Age UK Hertfordshire	Roundabout Transport
Assurability CIC	Salvation Army
Bobath Centre for Children with Cerebral Palsy	Scouts (29th Watford South (Methodist) Group)
Brick by Brick Communities	Scouts (4th North Watford, 1st Bricket Wood)
Bushey & Oxhey Care	Scouts (6th North Watford Group)
C V S Sailors	Scouts (9th North Watford Group)
Cathartic CIC	Seventh Day Adventists (Watford Town)
Christ Church and St Marks Churches	Sewa Day
Communities 1 st	Shopmobility Watford
Community Learning Partnership	Small Acts of Kindness
Coronavirus Community Help	Sri Singh Sabha Watford Gurdwara
Courtlands Residents Association	Stanborough Park Church
Disability Recreation Unity Movement (DRUM)	'TeamHerts Volunteering'
Dolphina Gym Club	The Ark Community Church
GROW Hostel	The Bowley Charity
Hand on Heart	The Living Room Hertfordshire
Hertfordshire Community Foundation	Three Rivers District Council
Hertfordshire County Council	Watford African and Caribbean Association
Herts Equality	Watford and District Industrial History Society
'HertsHelp'	Watford and Three Rivers Trust (W3RT)
Herts Inclusive Theatre	Watford Borough Council
Herts Pride	Watford Chamber of Commerce
Herts Vision Loss	Watford Citizens Advice Bureau
Holywell Community Centre	Watford Community Housing Trust
Home Start Watford	Watford Covid19 Support Group
Imagine Property Group	Watford Credit Union
Impactful Governance CIC	Watford Cycle Hub
Kent County Council	Watford Folk Club
Krishna Temple	Watford Interfaith Association
Music 24	Watford Muslim Youth Centre Trust
NCT Watford Branch	Watford Naturist Swimming Club
New Hope	Watford Polish Saturday School
Ngorli UK	Watford Sheltered Workshop
North Herts CVS	Watford Social Centre for the Blind
Oxhey Village Environment Group (OVEG)	Watford South Scouts
One Vision	Watford Underwater Club
One YMCA	Watford Workshop
Orbital Community Centre	Wiltshire Council
POhWER	Young People's Puppet Theatre
Pump House Theatre and Arts Trust	

And to those who chose to remain anonymous.

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