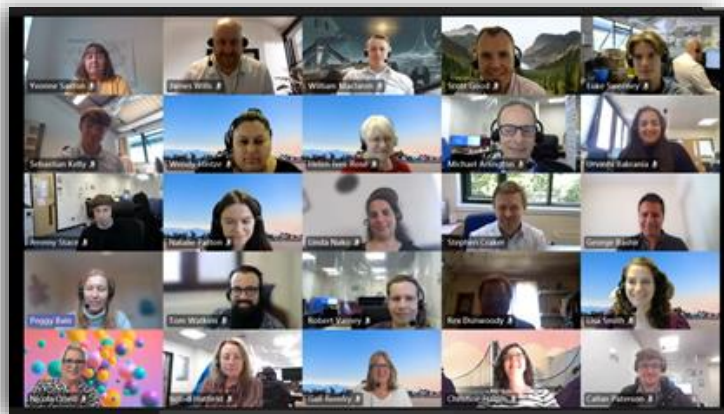
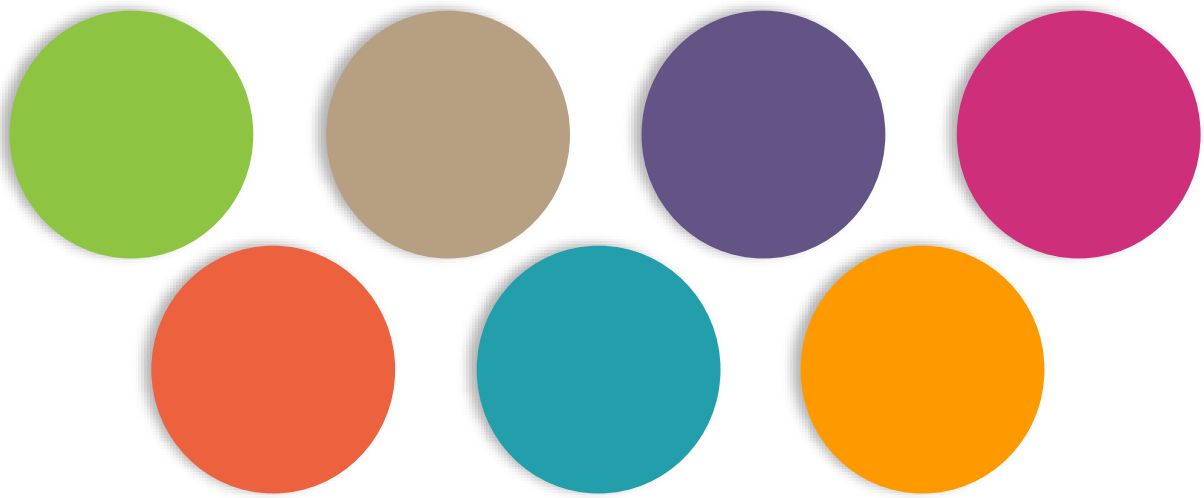


# Impact Report

## April 2020 – March 2021



# Introduction

## MISSION

To work with people across all sectors to make a positive and sustained impact on the wellbeing of local people through Support, Knowledge, Voice, Infrastructure and Innovation.

## VISION

Working to build inclusive, empowering and vibrant local communities.

## VALUES

- ✓ Inclusivity
- ✓ Forward-thinking
- ✓ Trust
- ✓ Professionalism
- ✓ Collaboration
- ✓ Independence

## WHAT WE DO:

- ✓ Provide support and advice to the VCFSE sector.
- ✓ Provide partnerships within the sector, and between the VCFSE sector and other sectors.
- ✓ Develop new ideas, strategies and organisations.
- ✓ Support and develop volunteering opportunities.

## STRATEGIC AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

DURING THE COVID SITUATION, LOCAL PEOPLE WHO NEED HELP ARE SUPPORTED AND KEPT AS SAFE AS POSSIBLE BY OUR NEW SERVICES

A MORE INDEPENDENT, EFFECTIVE AND SUSTAINABLE VOLUNTARY SECTOR

IMPROVED ACCESS TO VOLUNTEERING AND VOLUNTEERS

INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES ARE MORE CONNECTED, SUPPORTED AND INDEPENDENT

OUR OWN ORGANISATION IS DEVELOPED AND STRENGTHENED, IN ORDER TO DELIVER MAXIMUM RESULTS

## Foreword

During this strange and difficult year we, along with many others, have been faced with some dramatic and tough challenges. Our communities have needed our help more than ever, and we have stepped up to give our very best support we could.

At the beginning of the pandemic we faced a difficult choice: we could continue with our usual day to day services, or we could step up, develop and evolve our organisation in order to meet the new needs of the community. We chose to do the latter, and we have grown from an organisation with 60

volunteers covering an area of 250,000 people, to one with 7,000 volunteers, covering an area of over 2 million.

To successfully pivot our services to meet the community's new needs during the pandemic, we have had to be flexible, adaptable and dedicated. Looking to the future, our volunteers and staff will continue to do all they can to support local communities.

Throughout these rapid changes, our Centre for Voluntary Service has continued in our core role, providing support with funding

and development to 98 community, voluntary, faith and social enterprise organisations.

A lot of our clients have lost their confidence and may struggle to become fully independent again. We will continue providing essential services to clients who require it, whatever the future may bring.



Jason John,  
Chair



Stephen Craker,  
Chief Executive

# Our Year: April 2020 – March 2021

A week before the first UK national lockdown was announced, we created our Compassionate Community Connector programme, to deliver essential services to residents in vulnerable situations who would need to isolate or shield.

5,000 people signed up to volunteer with us in the first few months of the national lockdown. Our recruitment team grew dramatically from 1 ½ people to 105 people, and several of our volunteers moved into recruitment roles.

At the beginning of the pandemic we received 1,200 referrals for individuals who needed our service, including from people abroad who wanted to refer their family members in Hertfordshire. Many of these people didn't have anyone else to turn to, and were reaching the end of the supplies in their homes.

We were then asked by Welwyn and Hatfield Centre for Voluntary Service and Broxbourne and East Herts Volunteer Centre to help support their volunteer recruitment and coordination. After forming this partnership the area we were supporting rocketed from 250 thousand people to around 600 thousand.

Several organisations who were responding directly to the pandemic also requested our assistance, including Harpenden Cares, Wheathampstead Community Group, and

several food banks. We recruited volunteers for those still offering key services in the height of the first lockdown, including One YMCA and Herts Area Rape Crisis & Sexual Abuse Centre (HARCSAC).

By June Hertfordshire County Council had asked us to form a partnership of organisations who could deliver these essential services across the whole of Hertfordshire. Along with seven other voluntary organisations, we formed Community Help Hertfordshire.

This partnership has delivered vital services throughout the pandemic, including the Covid Information Champions initiative and Digital Inclusion project. It has also had a significant impact by bringing together county and district councils, as well as two NHS organisations, which may lead to the first strategic commissioning board for the Hertfordshire voluntary sector.

In November of 2020 we were approached by the local NHS to help them coordinate and recruit volunteers for vaccination sites across Hertfordshire and West Essex. We were subsequently asked to take on sites across Bedford, Luton and Milton Keynes.

This meant increasing our area of coverage again, this time from 600 thousand to over two million. We have recruited over 4,800 volunteers so far to assist the

vaccination effort, and we continue to vet and train volunteers for 22 vaccination sites across these areas.

Throughout the past year we have continued to streamline and adapt our computer system, to allow us to go from having around 60 volunteers to around 7,000.

*"The Dashboard works well for expense claims and it's been a great way to feel I'm contributing to the national effort of support for local communities."* – Mandy (Recruitment and shopping broker volunteer)

We created a programme to schedule volunteers for vaccination centre shifts, and then made it possible for volunteers to book their own shifts online. Volunteers using our technology have had constant support and training from digital champions.

We trained volunteers to help us with recruitment, scheduling and brokerage, to allow our staff to return to their day jobs and continue delivering our original services.

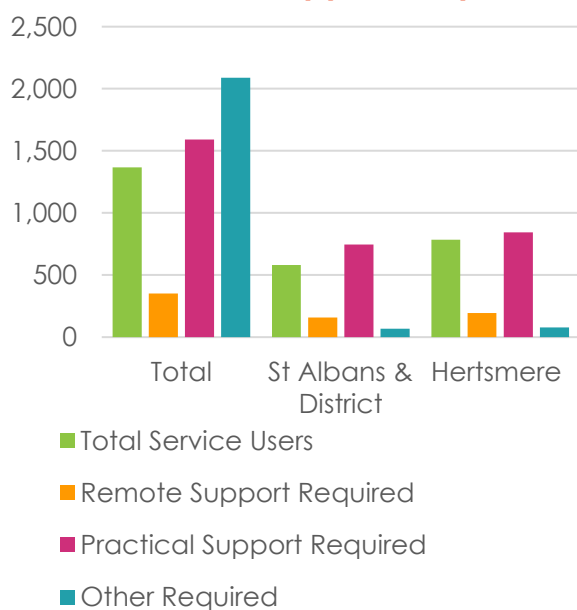
Throughout the pandemic we have faced every challenge head on, and have continued to adapt and streamline our organisation to be able to fulfil the ever changing needs of the community.

# Deliver Essential Services to Isolated Residents During COVID

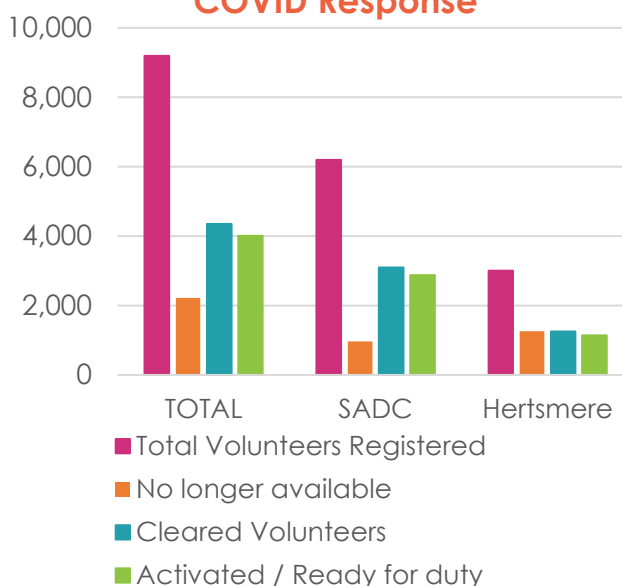
Between April 2020 and March 2021 we have:

- ✓ Provided vital support services to over **1,367** people as part of our Compassionate Community Connector initiative.
- ✓ Carried out **23,706** tasks in Hertsmere and **15,268** in St Albans, as part of our COVID-19 response.
- ✓ Registered over **982** volunteers in Hertsmere and **2,294** volunteers in St Albans, to help with our Compassionate Community Connector programme.
- ✓ Recruited **37** COVID Information Champions, to spread up to date, accurate guidance on COVID-19, especially to black, Asian, minority ethnic, and traditionally hard to reach communities.
- ✓ Delivered emergency, on the day prescription medicine to **569** residents Hertsmere & St Albans residents.

### COVID-19 Support Requests



### Volunteers Helping with COVID Response



*"We don't know what we would have done without them ... We're absolutely thrilled with their services." – Barbara (A client receiving shopping from us since September)*

*"It's been really valuable to me. I haven't had a support bubble. I think we've got on really well" - Janet (Of her telephone befriender)*

*'Whilst things are opening up, we can't assume everyone can go out and about. Today I volunteered for someone who needed their food shop done and it was a good feeling yet again! – Tamir (Shopping volunteer)*

## Key Activities Carried out in 2020/2021 include:

- ✓ Over **4,000** of our volunteers registered to help in vaccination centres, who have provided over **54,000** hours of support to community vaccination sites.
- ✓ Around **277** 'telephone befrienders' trained and matched with clients, to provide companionship to those most isolated during the pandemic.
- ✓ Pulse oximetry service started on behalf of GPS to deliver respiration equipment to individuals with COVID-19 symptoms.
- ✓ **107** people provided with technology support through our Digital Inclusion project.
- ✓ **35** digital devices donated to Hertsmere residents who experienced hardship due to digital exclusion.
- ✓ Provided free transport for **40** Hertfordshire residents to get to their vaccination appointments.
- ✓ Recruited **14** volunteers at local train stations through the Journey Makers project, to give travel guidance and ensure the safety of those on board.
- ✓ Launched our Walking Buddies and Bus Buddies schemes, that involve volunteers accompanying vulnerable clients outside so they can become more independent.

Volunteers at Herts Health vaccination centre



Volunteers at Harlow vaccination centre



Our staff celebrating Volunteers' Week with our wonderful volunteers.

**Case study – 21/04/20 – Tina** - One of our volunteers spoke to an anxious 72-year old woman living alone with underlying health conditions. She was struggling to use her laptop until our volunteer showed Tina how to reboot it and join her scheduled zoom meeting. Tina was registered for our telephone befriender, prescription collection and technical support schemes. After the call Tina was much happier, and full of praise for the organisation.

*"The service you operate is exceptional. I have met many lovely people whilst volunteering. Wish you all continued success!" - Joy (Vaccination centre volunteer)*

The Lord-Lieutenant of Hertfordshire, Robert Voss, who has been phoning Hertfordshire residents who are isolated or shielding, said: *"There is no doubt that they did, and still do, appreciate our calls and having a chat and we have enjoyed the chance to make these contacts."*

*"There is a real community feel within the dedicated teams at Batchwood. It's a positive and rewarding experience." – Jane Byrne (Vaccination centre volunteer)*

*"It's been great doing something positive during the pandemic. There is amazing team spirit at the site amongst the volunteers and staff." – Emma (Vaccination centre volunteer)*



Neal and Mike at Harlow vaccination centre



Harlow vaccination centre volunteers



Vaccination centre volunteers Gill and Sue



Letchworth vaccination centre volunteers



Stevenage vaccination centre volunteers

# Empowering Voluntary Sector Groups

We surveyed **110** member organisations 3 times, giving us a better insight into the needs of the voluntary sector.



organisations given one-to-one advice on potential funding sources and applications.



people attended over the three days of our Annual Conference and AGM.



We held **24** Stronger Together Network meetings, helping organisations plan for the future and address digital inclusion within the community.

## Key activities carried out during 2020/2021 included:

- ✓ Directed around **£100,000** worth of funding to community, voluntary, faith and social enterprise groups.
- ✓ Held weekly virtual coffee mornings for member organisations, that have provided support for individuals often working at home.
- ✓ Worked proactively to contact VCFSE organisations, carrying out three surveys of over **100** voluntary sector organisations in May, September and December, allowing us to better understand the state of the sector and provide necessary support, and report to stakeholder organisations such as Hertsmere Borough Council, St Albans City and District Council, NCVO and NAVCA.
- ✓ Provided one-to-one funding advice to an average of over **60** organisations.
- ✓ Provided one-to-one development support to an average of **6** organisations per month.

**For example:** We held a number of application 'surgeries' for member organisations applying to the SACDC Community Grants Fund. **18** out of 19 groups that we supported were successful in their grant

**For example:** We recruited tech support volunteers to help several organisations deliver services online and reach service users who struggled with technology, including Herts Inclusive Theatre.



*Robert Voss, Lord-Lieutenant of Hertfordshire, phoning isolated clients*



*Lisa and shopping delivery client Charles*



*Bernice, one of our Digital Champions*

## Further Activities Included:

- ✓ Supported and advised **36** new coronavirus Mutual Aid support groups on volunteering and safeguarding. E.g. Provided them with template documents.
- ✓ Our three day conference had over **120** attendees. It included three keynote speeches and eight workshops, and offered organisations the opportunity to begin planning for a post-COVID future.
- ✓ Held **eight** 'Meet the Funder' events with National Lottery, BBC Children in Need, Herts Community Foundation, The People's Postcode Lottery, Tesco Bags of Help, Comic Relief, Luton and Bedford Community Foundation.
- ✓ Created **66** jobs for local 16-24 year olds through our network of **15** local employers, after becoming a gateway organisation for the KickStart scheme.
- ✓ Hosted two 'transformed' Inspire Key Stage 3 Masterclasses online, as part of the Inspire programme.



One of our shielding clients receiving a gift bag



Aberford Bowling Green reopens



Graham – Handyman Service client



Mental health posters displayed at train stations



Jane, a shopping delivery volunteer, and her client Michael



Plants and bulbs that were distributed to clients with their shopping



# Supporting Individuals Wellbeing



Made **200** festive phone calls to those who were isolating or shielding.



people were helped in Borehamwood's Healthy Hub.



cards and letters were posted, as part of our 'Postcard Pals' scheme.



Bedtime stories were created, uploaded to a video platform, and shared with families.

## Over the Christmas period:

- ✓ Called around **1,900** individuals to see if they would like a 'festive phone call' over the Christmas period.
- ✓ Co-ordinated volunteer visits to around **100** clients, having a chat on their doorstep and leaving them gifts and mince pies.
- ✓ Made phone calls to almost **200** isolated clients over Christmas, some up to three times, to check in on their wellbeing.
- ✓ Sourced **30** Christmas gifts from the Abbey Line CRP to be added to PSRA foodbank's food parcels in December.
- ✓ Delivered **270** Hot meals to **127** families, with children who would normally receive free school meals, over the Christmas period.
- ✓ Created a virtual Christmas advent calendar with our volunteers that included **28** festive video clips. This was shared with all our clients and had over **4,000** views across social media and YouTube.



Christmas cards and letters for the 'Postcard Pals' scheme



A volunteer delivering hot meals for families



Our volunteers wrapping Christmas packages



Our virtual Christmas advent calendar!

*"I will be eternally grateful for the support and concern you have shown me. I didn't think there was anyone out there who would have cared so much about people the way you have done."*

– Paul (32 year old homeless person placed in temporary accommodation by Community Hub services)

## Key activities carried out during 2020/2021 included:

- ✓ Sent over **1,600** cards and letters to local elderly people who were shielding or isolating.
- ✓ Supported charities such as Centre 33 and Open Door, with food donations and volunteers. Linked Morrison's and Waitrose with food banks, leading to an ongoing weekly supply of food parcels from Morrison's to St Albans and District foodbank.
- ✓ Partnered with Warburton's to distribute around **2,600** loaves of bread to foodbanks and Pantry's across Hertsmere and St Albans.
- ✓ Coordinated a socially distanced collection of around **800** surplus bedding plants from Notcutt's Nurseries (Hatfield) and Aylett Nurseries (St Albans), that volunteers distributed to shielding clients along with their shopping.
- ✓ Collected and distributed over **300** Easter eggs to those shielding, donated by the National Trust.
- ✓ Maintained our Sensory Garden, securing a donation of seeds from Tesco in Borehamwood that were planted by volunteers.
- ✓ Distributed **880** litres of hand sanitizer across Hertfordshire's voluntary sector.
- ✓ Provided online and in person support for people completing the 2021 Census at our Community Hub.
- ✓ Delivered telephone support and directed those in need to external services from our Community Hub.

*"I can't thank you enough ... I was so worried I had to pay and not having the money for this. I don't know what I would have done as its my lifeline."*

– Peter (79 year old man who received advice and support about his television license)

*"Thank you so much for all your help, success! Seriously, I am so grateful for all your help in getting this done - it is very much appreciated" –*

IheaGraham (Client who received help with his fence panels through our service)

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## Further Activities Included:

- ✓ Distributed around **100** donated children's books to families.
- ✓ Arranged for three qualified counsellors to provide counselling services to Hertfordshire locals and volunteers.
- ✓ Carried out **332** journeys with our Community Transport Service and supported other areas when needed.
- ✓ Spearheaded a facemask initiative that provided Hertfordshire County Council with **900** facemasks during the lockdown.
- ✓ Continued running nursery group for key worker's children, which provided much needed child support throughout the year.
- ✓ Used Aberford Hall as a volunteer base to wrap gifts for Christmas Window visits and organise Small Acts of Kindness gift bags.
- ✓ Displayed **28** mental health posters permanently on seven stations along the Abbey Line.
- ✓ Carried out **176** jobs as part of our Handyperson service, to support residents who couldn't get assistance during the pandemic.

# Inspiring and Facilitating Volunteering

Matched **18** candidates and **7** organisations to roles at our virtual trustee speed matching sessions.



We delivered **10** online volunteer management training sessions.



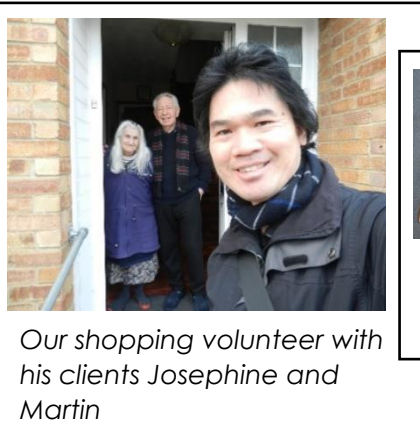
**157** individuals registered and applied for a non-covid-19 volunteering roles.



Voluntary organisations given important support whilst completing their Six Point Promise, Valuing Volunteer Management certificate.



One of our clients receiving Small Acts of Kindness gift bag



Our shopping volunteer with his clients Josephine and Martin



Masks made by our volunteers



Our 'Virtual Vaccination Volunteer Afternoon Tea' feedback session

## Key activities carried out during 2020/2021 included:

- ✓ Recruited a team of 'station adopters' for the Abbey Line Community Rail Project, including a gardening project at Watford Junction station supported by the Bee Friendly Trust.
- ✓ Over **8,500** volunteers completed over **8,000** online training courses across **37** subjects, including Safeguarding, Deaf Awareness, and Spot the Signs Save a Life.
- ✓ Helped **379** individuals register and apply for a non-COVID volunteering roles.
- ✓ Provided **301** people with brokerage support for non-COVID volunteering opportunities.
- ✓ Supported **20** volunteer led organisations to recruit more volunteers.
- ✓ Distributed volunteering e-newsletters to over 8,000 people, that have continued to effectively recruit volunteers for new roles.

## Other Activities:

- ✓ Produced around **2,000** badges for our own volunteers, and for other voluntary organisations.
- ✓ Distributed around **1,000** high visibility jackets, to ensure our volunteers safety and to make sure they know they are an important part of our team.
- ✓ Provided a DBS checking service throughout the pandemic, including for NHS 'Care Coordinators'.
- ✓ Advised **21** organisations in the district of St Albans on remote volunteer recruitment, motivation and volunteer-centric restructuring, through funding from St Albans City and District Council.

## Improving the mental and physical health of our volunteers:

We made a significant difference to the mental and physical health of our volunteers, by giving them purpose and structure during the lockdown:

*"I'm doing something for Communities 1st but they've also done something for me. It really made a big difference in terms of mental health, getting out of the house." – Lesley  
(Volunteer at four vaccination centres)*

*"Volunteering makes me feel useful, it gives me an identity ... it allows me to feel part of a teams ... it's a way of giving back" – Mandy (Shopper and vaccination centre volunteer)*

*"It's given me a positive routine, especially during the pandemic. It's a way to feel useful." – Julia (Volunteer recruitment and shopping broker)*

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## Looking to the future...

- ✓ Our new online volunteer recruitment system is being developed and we hope to have a full-scale rollout over the summer months.
- ✓ We will be hosting another Trustee Speed Matching session on Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> June, and another Volunteer Management training on May 20<sup>th</sup>.
- ✓ We will be increasing our number of Digital Champions to 80, across the districts of Hertsmere and St Albans, to support digital inclusion in the community.
- ✓ We hope to be able to offer our Inspire video showcases of professionals to other schools.

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## Communities 1st Factfile

### Registered Office

2 Allum Lane, Elstree WD6 3PJ

### St Albans Office

Civic Centre, St Peters Street, St Albans AL1 3JE

### Community Hub

Leeming Road  
Borehamwood WD6 4EB

### Company and Charity Registration

Registered in England and Wales as a Company Limited  
by Guarantee No: 11875362.  
Registered Charity No: 1187164.

### Contact Details

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E: us@communities1st.org.uk  
W: communities1st.org.uk  
SM: @1stCommunities

### Accountants

Caplan Associates

### Board of Directors / Trustees

Jason John (Chair)  
Sarah Yexley (Vice-Chair)  
Ross Gemmell (Treasurer)  
Chris Cloke  
Joy Dobbs  
Ann Harrison  
Sue Pearlman  
Ann Rogers  
Karl Wilding

### Company Secretary and Chief Executive

Stephen Craker

**We'd like to extend a huge, heartfelt thank you to all of our volunteers, and to anyone who volunteered for local charities during 2020/2021.**