



Impact Report

April 2024 - March 2025



Welcome to our Impact Report

Communities 1st brings people together through volunteering, accessible services, and practical support that helps individuals and organisations thrive. Whether it's helping someone find their first volunteer role, supporting a local group to grow, or connecting people to activities that improve health and wellbeing, we're here to make life better in the communities we serve.

Chair's foreword

As Chair of Communities 1st, I'm delighted to present our Impact Report for 2024-25.

This year has been one of growth, partnership, and significant achievement for Communities 1st. The successful merger with Welwyn Hatfield CVS has strengthened our ability to support and represent the local voluntary, community, faith, social enterprise (VCFSE) sector. As a unified organisation, we have expanded our reach and enhanced our impact, helping more groups and communities than ever before.

It has been rewarding to see the dedication and resilience of our staff, volunteers, and partners. Together, we have helped secure over £285,000 for local organisations, enabling them to deliver essential services and innovative projects. We were particularly pleased to see more groups come together to share ideas and develop stronger connections, building a sense of mutual support across the sector. The introduction of networking breakfasts and continued success of our thematic networks have also fostered stronger relationships and collective action among local groups.



Jason John, Chair

We remain committed to supporting and empowering communities, ensuring everyone feels welcome and able to participate, and helping build resilience across the region. Thank you to all who have contributed to our successes this year, including our dedicated volunteers, staff, trustees, and strategic partners - we look forward to building on these achievements together

Our mission, values and goals

Our mission:

To partner with local communities, turning knowledge and energy into action and progress.

Our vision:

Strong local communities where everyone has the opportunity to thrive and make a meaningful difference

Our values



Inclusivity



Caring



Collaboration



Creative



Quality



Integrity

Our goals:

- 1** To develop a more resilient, effective and representative local voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) sector.
- 2** To ensure volunteering is more recognised, visible and valued in the community, providing improved community wellbeing and personal development.
- 3** To achieve improved health and wellbeing where individuals facing barriers or experiencing inequalities are supported and resilient.
- 4** To be a sustainable, inclusive and responsible organisation driven by our values.

Chief Executive's summary of the year

Reflecting on the past year, I am proud of how Communities 1st has continued to evolve, embracing new challenges and opportunities with determination and creativity. Our efforts have led to meaningful progress across many areas - from securing vital funding for local organisations to us being able to enhance volunteering, training, employment support, and wellbeing programmes. We've continued to respond to the changing needs of our communities with agility, compassion, and commitment.

This year marked a significant milestone in our journey with the merger of Communities 1st and Welwyn Hatfield CVS. This merger has expanded our reach and increased our capacity to support communities across Hertfordshire. It has also ensured a more unified, coordinated approach to delivering local services and amplifying community voices.



We worked with our members to shape and publish a series of local voluntary sector 'what we stand for' policy statements. These now provide a shared foundation for influencing decisions and championing the sector more effectively.

Our commitment to creating meaningful connections between business and community has been demonstrated through the expansion of our Better Business programme. We doubled our business engagement this year and saw a marked rise in employer-supported volunteering.

Through the Multiply programme, over 600 people have gained essential numeracy skills. At the same time, 133 individuals secured employment through initiatives such as Able2Enable, which supports people facing barriers due to disability or mental health challenges. Our new 'Future Focus: Empowering Potential' programme offers integrated, personalised employment pathways, designed to deliver faster and more effective results.



Chief Executive's summary of the year (continued...)

Innovation has remained central to our work. One example is our 'Community Thirst' Coffee Cart at St Albans Civic Centre - providing real-world work experience and life skills development. We also launched a 'dance for all' training programme that has widened access to creative opportunities for people of all abilities.

Communities 1st has further strengthened its role as a trusted local delivery partner by supporting residents moving to the UK government's new eVisa system and by securing new funding to expand our Creative Cafes in community centres across Hertsmere.

All of these achievements reflect the power of partnerships - with local authorities, funders, charities, community groups, volunteers, and residents. Thank you to everyone who has been part of this journey. Together, we are helping build stronger, fairer and more connected communities.



Stephen Craker,
Chief Executive Officer

for more information about our projects and services, visit www.communities1st.org.uk



A more resilient, effective and representative local VCFSE sector



Advice and support provided helped local VCFSE organisations secure **£285,000+**



We provided 117 VCFSE organisations with 1:1 development support and funding advice



Our annual conference was attended by over **130 people**



250 individuals attended our Stronger Together Network (STN) meetings, providing an opportunity for local groups to come together to discuss concerns, and share best practice



Worked closely with key partners to host the Hertfordshire Funding Fair, attended by **150** people, which facilitated connections and practical funding opportunities



Four membership newsletters around funding, policy, training and volunteering received by **9,921** individuals



Supported **88** food distribution organisations through advice and support

Highlights

Published a comprehensive series of 'what we stand for' policy statements shaped with input from our members, providing a robust framework for collective advocacy and informed representation of the sector's views.

Launched breakfast networking events, drawing in new members and encouraging face-to-face conversations on practical issues including funding, staffing, and volunteering.

Led a strategic Food Distribution Project commissioned by Hertfordshire County Council, working with CVS partners to map existing services, provide expert advice, and support local organisations to better manage rising levels of need.



Communities 1st

Centre for
Voluntary Service

Supporting local charities and community groups
for the districts of St Albans, Hertsmere
and Welwyn Hatfield

Volunteering is more recognised, visible and valued



475 Volunteers registered with our Let's Give online volunteering platform where organisations can search for potential volunteers by skill-set



161 New volunteering opportunities promoted on behalf of other organisations



82 local businesses engaged, greatly boosting their social responsibility initiatives and volunteer engagement



12 individuals attended training sessions for volunteer managers



5,508 individuals received our volunteering newsletters

Highlights

Expanded our Better Business initiative, successfully doubling business engagement and significantly increasing employee participation in community volunteering activities.

Conducted targeted presentations on volunteering benefits for over **280** NHS employees, fostering new volunteer recruitment opportunities and sector support.

Prioritised the promotion and recruitment of traditionally challenging volunteer roles, including trustees, drivers, and befrienders, ensuring vital community services could continue uninterrupted.

We were the only Local Infrastructure Organisation invited to a national DCMS roundtable on improving volunteer data and 'passporting' volunteers between organisations.



988 enquiries dealt with via our Volunteer Centre



296 volunteer applications managed via our Volunteer Centre



334 hours of employer-related volunteering facilitated by staff



Communities 1st
Volunteer Centre

Helping you make a bigger difference
Broxbourne • East Herts • Hertsmere
St Albans • Welwyn Hatfield

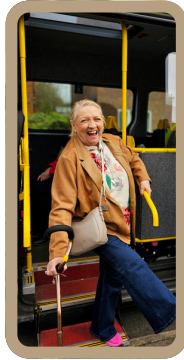
What our members, beneficiaries and volunteers said about us in 2024/25

Communities 1st's impact this year reached thousands of individuals. Here's what some of them shared about the impact we've had.

“ Having your help to apply online (for a Blue Badge) made it quick and easy. This will make such a big difference to me, it will allow me to park nearer to hospitals when I'm attending medical appointments now and I won't have to worry about finding a parking space. Brilliant service.

“ We are delighted to inform you that Akifa Foundation now has charity status. We are thankful for your advice, guidance in this long process. We hope to work with Communities 1st, strengthening our relationship further.

“ The (Sustainable Budgets) training gave me the space to zoom out, get out of the weeds, and start shaping a more sustainable business model. Highly recommend to anyone looking to build a resilient and purpose-led enterprise.



“ I currently receive your befriending telephone calls which have been invaluable to my wellbeing and a fantastic help to my mental health. It gives me less loneliness and isolation and I'm very grateful for these services.

“ (Day)trips like this are invaluable and can brighten someone's day. A great initiative - well done team.

“ I was first introduced to Communities 1st as a foreigner arriving in a new country. I faced unique challenges in the job market, but their dedicated team provided support through guidance and counselling that helped me thrive. What impressed me most was that they connected me with organisations that will benefit from my skills set, making me feel part of a community.

“ 100 percent I would recommend being a volunteer with Communities 1st. They provide a wonderful range of services and there are lots of things that you can do. It is lovely what they do, and I wish more people knew about them.

“ From the very start, I was made to feel part of the team. I'm able to say what I'm thinking, and I feel I'm listened to. Nobody takes what I'm doing for granted. I'm always appreciated and thanked. That's important and it keeps me going.



“ I've had a coffee from here (Communities Thirst) every day this week and it is delicious and served with a wonderful smile!

Our staff highlights of 2024/25

Our dedicated staff made a real difference this year. From personal connections to delivering training and leading events, here are just a few stories that inspired us.

“Being asked for my autograph at the Move It event at London Excel by a young girl who recognised me from Parallel Windsor! She loves to dance and has been excluded at many mainstream after-school activities due to her disability. For the first time, whilst doing the Greatest Dancer Challenge with me, she felt included and inspired to dance her own way and had the best time. This was such a lovely moment and I felt truly honoured to be able to provide her with joy and a positive experience.

“Delivering an Interview Skills event at a local school (Yavneh, Hertsmere) for the whole of Year 10. Twenty-five volunteers from a range of local employers took part, helping young people develop crucial employability skills.

“An avid knitter from Borehamwood could no longer knit which upset her greatly. She donated her knitting materials to our Create Cafés and Knit and Natter group. I suggested to her son that the knitting group create a blanket for her using the donated materials. It has been created by the people in her community and provided the group with a meaningful project.

“I provided eVisa transition support to over 40 clients and developed a comprehensive knowledge about the transition. As a result, I was able to help many clients outside of my regular reach.

“I am most proud of my learners from a New You course who have gone on to be volunteers. In particular one, who volunteered as an assistant on the next New You course. His learning and lived experience was invaluable to new students and he now has the confidence to present on a workshop at our upcoming AGM.

“Delivering Introduction to Bookkeeping training throughout the year to local sole traders and people planning to start their own businesses. We were able to deliver insight, improve numeracy in the local community, and help small local businesses achieve sustainability.

“In November, we hosted a volunteering stand at Heathlands School's careers day, a specialist school for deaf students in St Albans. Over 100 attendees explored tailored volunteering opportunities using our visual board, supported by an interpreter. Feedback showed it helped students overcome communication barriers, build confidence, and see volunteering as a way to gain experience. It inspired me to start learning BSL.

“The success of the Broxbourne Volunteer Fair made me feel proud. Seeing so many people engaging with local organisations was inspiring. It was extremely satisfying to have the Hertfordshire and West Essex Integrated Care Board record the event as an example for other ICBs nationally.

Adult Skills and Learning (Personal Development)



600+ individuals engaged with the Multiply project and 336 went on to attend one of our training sessions



402 individuals attended air frying and slow cooking courses



160+ work experience students welcomed and supported

Able2Enable 159 individuals registered with Able2Enable, for people who might need extra support to access volunteering opportunities



Delivered inclusive dance sessions to **163** participants through our Para Dance programme



116 individuals attended our Wellbeing and Life Skills Awareness Sessions - over three times more than last year



Enhanced employment opportunities for **133** individuals through our employment initiative

Highlights

Successfully launched our comprehensive 'Future Focus; Empowering Potential' employment support scheme, providing integrated support pathways for participants and ensuring faster, broader, and more effective interventions.

Launched the 'Community Thirst' Coffee Cart at St Albans Civic Centre, offering practical, hands-on employment training and life skills development.

Expanded our Dance For All Training courses, reaching more people and raising awareness of accessible recreational opportunities.

Delivered activity sessions at Parallel Windsor for over **150** people, supporting participation in a national disability-focused event.

Shared our inclusive dance work at Move It 2025, building new connections at a key national dance platform.

Improved Health and Wellbeing



1,084 health and wellbeing enquiries were answered through our Healthy Hubs, offering advice, referrals, and signposting to local support services



1000+ Individuals accessed our Better Days Hubs for support with wellbeing, skills, volunteering, and more



350 people attended our health and wellbeing awareness events and activities



781 Practical support tasks completed by our volunteers



1,247 befriending calls especially during challenging periods such as Christmas



244 individuals provided with energy efficiency support, including carbon monoxide alarms.



163 refugees and asylum seekers supported through our Beyond Borders project



83 individuals received support to navigate the transition to the UK's E-visa system



60,000+ visits to our managed community centres



Over 9,000 journeys made through our community transport services



2,897 attendees at our Welcome Space Hubs

Highlights

Enhanced our Healthy Hub services, prioritising initiatives such as smoking cessation, diabetes management, and NHS health checks.

Expanded community centre activities through additional funding from **Clarion Futures** and the **Rothersey Foundation**, enabling broader community engagement and diversified support services.



Communities 1st
Wellbeing Support

Connecting you with help and wellbeing services

Looking to the future

As we look ahead, Communities 1st is preparing for a period of significant change - both within our organisation and across the wider system in which we operate. Despite the uncertainty in national and local policy landscapes, our purpose remains clear: to strengthen communities, empower voluntary action, and help local people and organisations thrive.



In the coming year, the implications of the Local Government Review and the reshaping of NHS commissioning - particularly the streamlining of Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) - will begin to take effect. These changes will alter how decisions are made, how services are commissioned, and who holds influence. As a trusted partner rooted in our local places, we will continue to represent the voice of the voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) sector and ensure communities are not left behind in the process.



We are also undergoing internal transformation. Alongside our recent merger with Welwyn Hatfield CVS, we are finalising a further organisational merger that will bring together creativity, community engagement, and social enterprise in new and exciting ways. This development will broaden our service offer, and allow us to embed creative, culturally relevant and creative practice into the heart of our community programmes.



Looking ahead, we will:

1 Champion the role of the VCFSE sector in system-wide solutions, supporting partners across health, local government and housing to engage more meaningfully and equitably with community organisations.

2 Adapt our delivery models to align with new commissioning structures, enabling more responsive, place-based services that reflect the real needs of residents.



3 Scale up successful pilots, including our inclusive employment and enterprise initiatives, ensuring they become embedded, sustainable and community-led.

4 Continue investing in innovation, including digital tools, creative practice, and new ways of engaging volunteers and residents in shaping local support.

5 Strengthen our leadership voice, ensuring we speak up not only for the sector, but with it - through collaborative policy work, shared learning, and collective advocacy.

6 Support local organisations through uncertainty, helping them to navigate funding changes, increased demand, and growing complexity with practical tools, advice and solidarity.



At Communities 1st, we know that the future will not be without its challenges. But we also know that meaningful change happens when people come together. We remain committed to working alongside communities, partners, and our members - building a fairer, more resilient and connected future for all.

Net Zero

Communities 1st remains committed to reducing our environmental impact and working towards Net Zero. This year, we've embedded sustainability into our work – from improving energy efficiency in community spaces to reducing unnecessary travel and paper use. Staff continue to reflect on their carbon footprints and explore practical steps to reduce them. Although plans to roll out Net Zero training with partners have not yet progressed, we remain committed to supporting the local VCFSE sector to better understand and act on climate-related challenges. Looking ahead, we are exploring new ways to measure our progress and build environmental responsibility into wider organisational planning.

Pay gap

Communities 1st believes in equality of opportunity for all. Although we employ fewer than 250 staff (currently 58) and are not required to publish gender pay gap information, we do so voluntarily and encourage others in the sector to do the same. As of 1 April 2024, the median and mean hourly earnings for male and female employees are as follows:

	Male Hourly Earnings (£)	Female Hourly Earnings (£)	Difference (£)	Difference (%)
Median	12.00	13.96	-1.96	16.33
Mean	14.21	14.78	-0.55	-3.83

For comparison, the UK gender pay gap in 2024 was 7% in favour of men (ONS). At Communities 1st, the gap is 16.33% (median) and 3.83% (mean) in favour of women, meaning women here earn more than men on average. The gender pay gap shows average earnings across all roles, not equal pay for the same work. While our gap does not present a concern, we will continue to monitor both gender and equal pay closely.

Memberships and Associated Bodies

Communities 1st is proud to be a member and partner of the following national bodies and local organisations to provide us and our members greater opportunities for national representation, networking, resources and influence for the voluntary and community sector.



Communities 1st Annual Accounts

We routinely monitor our organisational and sector-wide performance against key outcomes. We are proud of the work undertaken during the year, which aligns with our strategic priorities and continues to deliver value to both the communities we serve and the wider voluntary sector.

For the financial year ending 31 March 2025, Communities 1st received total income of £1,631,442 (2023/24: £1,352,470). Of this, £80,000 (2023/24: £61,758) was received as restricted income, earmarked for specific programmes and projects. The remaining £1,551,442 (2023/24: £1,290,712) was unrestricted and comprised a mix of grant funding, donations, membership income, and revenue generated through service-level agreements and other service delivery activity.

Unrestricted income continues to be critical to the financial resilience and sustainability of the charity. During the year, we distributed £285,000 (2023/24: £228,900) in funding to local voluntary and community organisations through our grant and contract programmes.

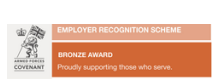
	Unrestricted Funds	Restricted Funds	Total 24/25
Incoming Resources	£1,551,442	£80,000	£1,631,442
Resources Expended	£1,516,504	£65,343	£1,581,847
Surplus (Deficit)	£34,938	£14,657	£49,595

The Trustees have reviewed the charity's financial position, including budgets and projected cash flows through to March 2025. They are satisfied that the organisation is financially sound and able to meet its obligations as they fall due. There are no material uncertainties regarding the charity's ability to continue as a going concern. (See also Note 2: Accounting Policies in our Annual Accounts 2024/25.)

Pledges and quality marks

We actively uphold a range of recognised pledges and quality marks that reflect our dedication to fair pay, equality, the wellbeing of staff and volunteers, digital security, and environmental responsibility. We are proud to hold the following:





Thank You
to our wonderful volunteers for
all your hard work and the
difference you make!

Communities 1st Fact File

Board of Directors / Trustees

Jason John (Chair)
Sarah Yexley (Vice-Chair)
Ross Gemmell (Treasurer)
Roberta Beaton
Chris Cloke
Joy Dobbs
Ann Harrison
John Howson
Sue Pearlman
Ann Rogers
Karl Wilding
Julia Tilbury, Co-Optee (joined January 2025)
Madeleine Clark, Co-Optee (joined January 2025)

Company Secretary and Chief Executive

Stephen Craker

Accountants

Bradshaw Johnson Chartered Accountant
and Statutory Auditors

Contact Details

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 @Communities1st

Registered Office

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St Albans, AL2 2DR

Community Hubs

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235 High Street, Waltham Cross, EN8 7BA

Company and Charity Registration

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