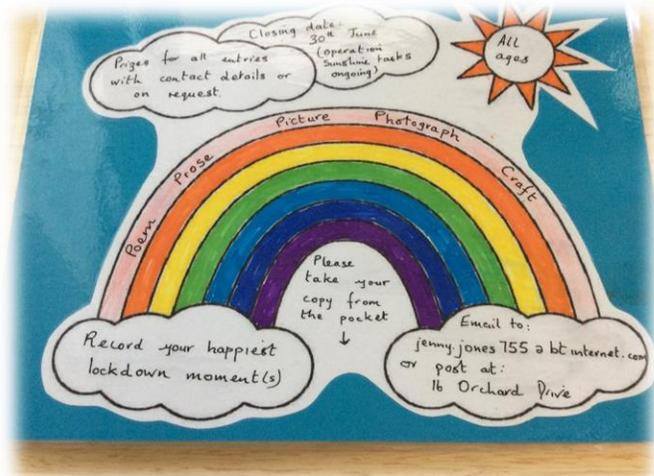


Cheshire Parish and Town Councils Respond to the Challenges of Covid-19



society action service youth group
 volunteerism honor change love skills
 communities nonprofit vibrant senior volunteer program
volunteers
 build service volunteer
Thank You
 hope diverse family thanks heart prosperous difference
community
 mission corporate celebrate
HandsOn
 friends
 activities



This is what we do as local councils!

By mid-March 2020 the emerging impact of Covid-19 was starting to be felt across the Cheshire, Halton, Warrington and Trafford areas.

Many Town and Parish Councils (local councils) subsequently took actions to support their local communities. From setting up volunteer support groups in collaboration with local churches to support the most vulnerable to funding sewing groups to make face coverings, scrub bags and uniforms for the NHS, ChALC councils have shared some inspiring stories of the activities they have taken to support their communities.

This report summarises the responses received, shares some of the comments made and provides 5 short case studies which feature some more specific actions.

General Information

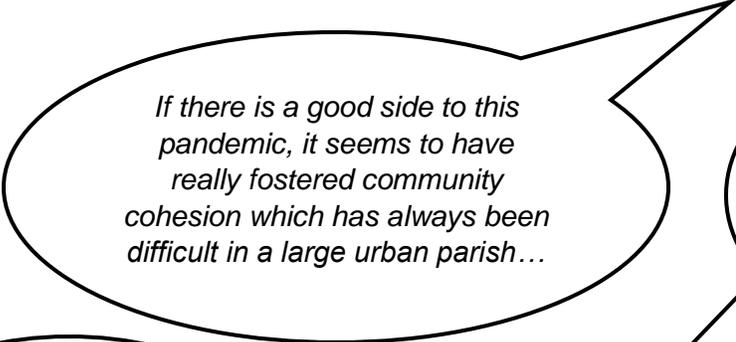
41 councils provided information about their activities

- 26 from Cheshire East
- 13 from Cheshire West
- 1 from Trafford Metropolitan
- 1 from Halton

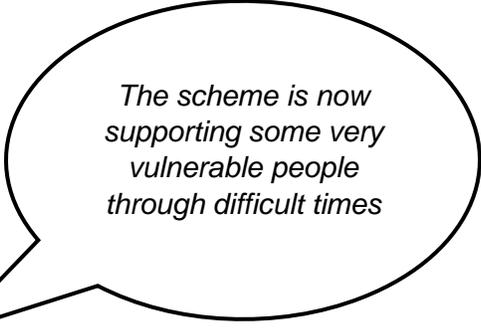
Responses were collated into a spreadsheet under key headings. These headings have been used to form this report.



The virus has shown us that, in a global crisis, the scale for action is local and businesses and residents have truly galvanised to provide vital support for residents



If there is a good side to this pandemic, it seems to have really fostered community cohesion which has always been difficult in a large urban parish...



The scheme is now supporting some very vulnerable people through difficult times



It really has been a privilege to serve the community in this way



We found that, on the whole, the community came together very well and neighbours helped neighbours

1. Grants and Donations



15 councils had been able to provide a grant or donation – these were for: -

- Sewing groups making scrub bags, hats and uniforms for a wider NHS appeal
- Signs thanking the NHS
- Providing 5 skips for the community so garden waste could be removed in April and May
- Planting of sunflowers across parish
- Provision of a freezer to help store food for the elderly and vulnerable
- Charitable groups and networks
- Providing stock for the local foodbank
- Activities during lockdown
- Provision and distribution of hand sanitiser for the vulnerable and self-isolators

Although not directly a Covid response there was also a lot of energy put into the VE day celebrations. Garden parties (in own gardens), music piped, competitions for best decorations, bunting everywhere!

CASE STUDY – HUNTINGTON PARISH COUNCIL (Cheshire West and Chester)

“The lockdown has been so terrible in many ways but the community spirit shown within Huntington during this crisis has been amazing!”
Louise Gibson, Clerk

Huntington
Emergency
Reach
Out



The Parish Council set up the Huntington Volunteer Network which is managed by councillors and members from the local Church (St Luke's), with strong support from the local PTA. Some 125 volunteers came forward to help during the crisis and the council provided funds for the Network so they could deliver leaflets street by street to the 2500 homes in Huntington. The church was used as a pickup point for leaflets and the parish council also provided face masks for the volunteers.

The leaflet was delivered twice during lockdown. It provided a helpline number for the Huntington Volunteer Network where a local person could help them, signposts to CWAC services, national helplines and services, foodbank/food poverty information, food deliveries in the areas and a short newsletter from each medical centre in the area. It also included a number for prospective volunteers.

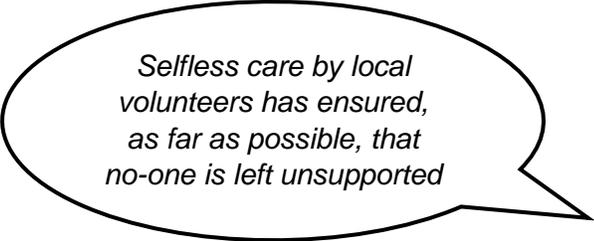
The council will continue the volunteer network for the duration of the year and are now discussing how they can use the amazing goodwill to do some more good within the community.

2. Volunteer Groups

Most of the councils had reacted quickly in establishing their own Covid-19 volunteer support groups before or just after lockdown. The remainder had either supported their local residents as they set up their own support group or had worked in collaboration with other established agencies such as Snow Angels, or the Borough Council or Church.

Literally hundreds of volunteers have been recruited and they have helped with a range of tasks including: -

- Shopping
- Collecting prescriptions
- Friendship calls
- Signposting to information
- Dog Walking



Selfless care by local volunteers has ensured, as far as possible, that no-one is left unsupported

Some volunteers were paired or 'buddied' with individuals, and undoubtedly some relationships between helpers and the vulnerable will remain as lockdown eases.

CASE STUDY – LITTLE BOLLINGTON (Cheshire East)

"There will be great value in maintaining a support network for people in need" Mike Reed, Clerk

The Parish Council created the Little Bollington Community Support Service for all residents within Bollington and the immediate neighbouring areas, with the aim to ensure that no-one was left behind and that anyone who may need help would be able to get it easily. The service was brought into being thanks to prompting by a superb offer of help which came out of the blue from a resident just outside the village.

Comprehensive guidelines for volunteers were prepared to explain the scheme, how it operates, the role of volunteers and rules on keeping safe and safeguarding. Three Community Champions were appointed to manage the service including receiving, assessing and directing calls for help. Some 25 volunteers, including the local ward councillor, were recruited as well as 6 church ministers and lay members trained in listening and counselling.

A shopping service was also created in parallel, and a list of vulnerable residents who need this service has been created which is frequently updated. The service is based on a shopping list order. Calls for shopping orders are issued twice weekly, volunteers will collect shopping and deliver to the front door, and reimbursement made by electronic payment methods.

The Service was promoted widely with a leaflet delivered to all households, by email, social media and on the Little Bollington website, and was extended into the neighbouring parish of Millington by agreement with their parish council.

3. Children and Young People

A few councils had been able to set up activities and competitions, whilst others have focussed on safely re-opening play areas and play groups or have worked with other organisations. Some have signposted to young people's mental health services

- **Guilden Sutton** - had funded skipping ropes for children which were left near the closed playground and children were also encouraged to paint stones and pebbles and leave near the playground.
- **Huntington** – with the help of a resident children were given access to a tree which was made into a 'Fairy Garden' that they could come and look at. This encouraged children to get out and about during lockdown. A Scarecrow Competition has been recently launched to keep children occupied making their own and to encourage daily walks to spot others.



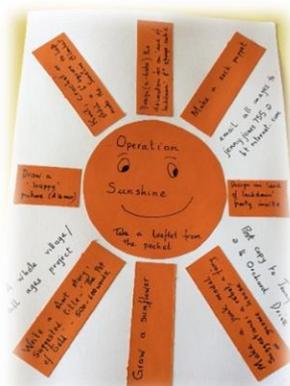
It has been quite astounding at times, the adaptations and thinking on our feet...

CASE STUDY – LITTLE LEIGH (Cheshire West and Chester)

The brainchild of one the councillors led to a grant of £150 towards 'Operation Sunshine' which was set up right at the beginning of lockdown by Little Leigh Parish Council. This encouraged various activities such as craft projects; stories on lockdown memories; grow a sunflower; draw/paint a happy picture; make a sock puppet; make a junk model; design the decoration for an 'end of lockdown' 8" cake; and design an 'end of lockdown' party invitation .

Several modes of publicity were used to promote this initiative including the Village Facebook, other social media, posters, personal handouts and word of mouth.

Almost all tasks could be tackled at different levels and by all age groups with aim to make the project as inclusive as possible. This has proved to be the case particularly with sunflower growing, junk modelling, story writing & picture drawing, and many tasks are ongoing. The most successful project was knitting yellow squares to make the Sunshine Blanket; over 100 squares have been knitted. The blanket will be assembled by the Village Knit & Knatter Group when The Village Hall reopens.



4. Community Messaging and Collaborations

As can be expected, councils utilised a wide range of methods to share messages across their communities. These included: -

- Leaflet and flyer drops
- Notice boards and posters
- Websites
- FaceBook and FaceBook Live
- Zoom meetings
- Telephone calls
- Letters and Newsletters
- WhatsApp groups
- Weekly e-bulletins



There have been examples of close collaborations with local shops and businesses, charities, parks, cemeteries, local newspapers, health and faith organisations, and the police to address issues of isolation, local food provision and delivery, access to hand sanitiser, and community safety. Some parishes are now community referral bases and will be contacted by health services or borough councils for assistance e.g. for patient discharges.

CASE STUDY – GAWSWORTH WARD (Cheshire East)

“These are truly phenomenal achievements by amazing rural communities who swiftly came together and worked out systems to ensure vulnerable residents were supported safely.”

Lesley Smetham, Ward Councillor



Local churches and community groups in the eight parishes of Gawsorth Ward quickly came together to arrange for residents to be supported in unusual times. Most parishes produced a leaflet for distribution; a good practice guide / Code of Conduct; and a WhatsApp phone group for fast communication and to ensure that they acted professionally and legally. Organisations originated telephone cascade groups to offer support.

Core teams asked those requiring assistance to register with their websites or with a co-ordinator and volunteers were requested to register what they could provide, such as shopping, pastoral care and information. Some parishes use social media for information sharing.

The larger parish with a Community Village Shop and Hub co-ordinates a weekly leaflet with a regular quiz and other initiatives, such as wear a hat day and a celebration of 25,000 days of the reign of Queen Elizabeth, to help boost morale.

It was rewarding to be able to share extra donations with overstretched foodbanks in neighbouring towns.

CASE STUDY – AUDLEM (Cheshire East)

“Audlem’s residents live in a village that has always been full of community spirit and one that has come together in such a tremendous way during these challenging times.” Audlem Parish Council

Audlem’s Parish Council, businesses and residents have truly galvanised to provide vital support to its residents. Businesses have shown they have big hearts with The Lord Combermere pub becoming a busy community hub to help the village. It has been an immense help in liaising with local charity Audlem and District Community Action (ADCA) to get food delivered to the community. The Parish Council donated a freezer to the pub so that they could store food for the elderly and vulnerable. On VE Day ADCA staff and volunteers delivered a celebratory ‘afternoon tea’ complete with Union Jack hat and flag – from food donated and prepared by the pub’s owners and chefs – to some 60 individuals either self-isolating or unable to go out during lockdown.

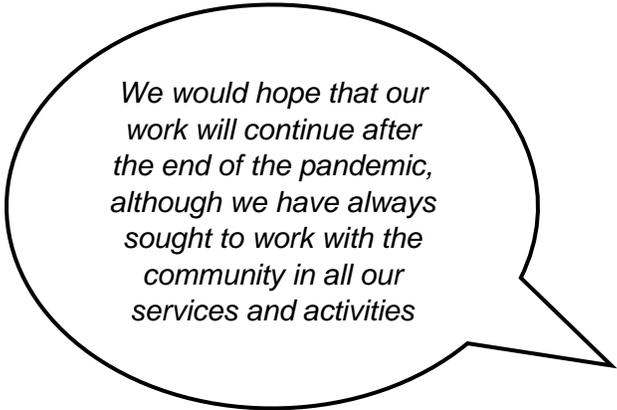
The pub has opened a pop-up shop as well as offering a special take away menu for home delivery. Williams of Audlem Ltd rapidly expanded their home newspaper deliveries, increased running errands for elderly and isolating customers, and put up a banner to thank the NHS workers. They also ran a raffle to raise money for the church. The local butcher Oxtail & Trotter is making home deliveries of meat and vegetables twice a week to everyone, and the team at the local Boots pharmacy worked deep into the evening to manage the influx of extra prescriptions as people prepared to lock down and they have supported patients brilliantly throughout.

5. Post Lockdown

Most councils either felt that they would not be continuing any activities, or that they were unsure at this stage. Whilst there were some indications that councils would maintain their contacts, only a few said they would be continuing and building on the work carried out to date.

Perhaps the comment made by one council is a fitting conclusion to this report.

“Residents have been able to see just what the PC can actively do for them and that councillors are available and easily approachable to deal with any local issues they may wish to raise”



We would hope that our work will continue after the end of the pandemic, although we have always sought to work with the community in all our services and activities



Things have been tough but the community has really pulled together and the Council has sought to help wherever asked

Thank you to all our Contributor Councils

Alsager
Antrobus
Audlem
Bunbury
Burland
Comberbach
Cranage
Disley
Dunham Massey
Gawsworth Ward
Great Boughton
Guilden Sutton
Helsby
Henbury
High Legh
Holmes Chapel
Huntington
Ince
Kettlethulme
Lach Dennis and Lostock Green
Little Bollington
Little Leigh
Marton
Mobberley
Nether Alderley
Newbold Astbury cum Moreton
Peckforton
Peover Superior
Plumley with Toft and Bexton
Sandymoor
Snelson
Somerford
Spurstow
Stoke & Hurlleston
Tiverton and Tilstone Fearnall
Utkinton and Cotebrook
Whitley
Willaston
Willington
Winsford
Worleston & District

The majority of local residents consider the community spirit in our village is outstanding at all times. This recent crisis has re-affirmed that, with a whole community response being something to be proud of.

The clerk has been excellent, and we are so lucky to have her!

Hopefully the community spirit that has emerged during the lockdown will continue in different ways

We have had over 50 volunteers from the village offering to do this role and I would like to personally thank every one of them