

**Staffordshire County Council  
Covid-19 Support and Recovery Fund  
2020/21 Report and next steps**



## **Introduction – County Councillor Victoria Wilson, Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture**

The role of Staffordshire county councillors in supporting our residents is essential. One way in which we are supported as local leaders, is that we are equipped with a small grant fund, to help us invest in Staffordshire's communities for the benefit of local people.

In 2019/20, we focused this fund on projects which would keep local people independent and supported within their own homes and communities, long before they needed support from the county council's care teams. It was a new approach for the funding, and we had been looking at how to build on our success for a second year in 2020/21.

However as we all know, we then hit unprecedented times with the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. Extremely quickly, we faced a need for emergency funding, and for working in new ways, and we quickly refocused the member fund to be about supporting communities through the pandemic.

I am extremely proud of our communities for their response, from March 2020 and ever since. Sometimes overnight, groups were established across Staffordshire to look after vulnerable people and keep community activities going in new ways. We saw a surge of voluntary activity as people did whatever they could to support those around them (in a safe way). That is the strength of Staffordshire's people, and I am proud that we as county councillors were able to use our funding to support it.

This report gathers only some of the examples from the huge range of projects and organisations that the funding supported, but I hope that it gives you a sense of how a terrible situation was met by an incredible response from Staffordshire's people.

## Background

Following an announcement by the Leader of the Council at the 19 March meeting of the County Council, the Covid-19 Support Fund was launched on 30 March 2020.

The Covid-19 Support Fund saw £2500 allocated to each County Councillor, to invest in projects which supported communities through the pandemic. Councillors were able to use as much or as little of this £2500 as they wanted to support projects which needed it, or to work together with other councillors and jointly support bigger projects.

Funding was available initially for two purposes:

1. Projects about providing support to the community re the coronavirus. Groups activity had to relate to:
  - a. supporting people who are self-isolating or in quarantine
  - b. helping the community to be resilient against wider impacts of Covid-19
  - c. developing community networks to do either of the above.
2. Providing funding to existing community groups who are facing a reduced income due to the impact of Covid-19 (for example around paying overheads while facing reduced incomes).

From July 2020 onwards, county councillors were equipped with a second tranche of the funding because of the ongoing emergency situation, with an additional £2000 to allocate per member. The two fund uses above remained, but a third was added in recognition of the fact that some community organisations were beginning to open back up:

3. Projects which relate to community recovery, sustaining new social action, restarting activity which had been paused, or adapting provision for the 'new normal'.

The combined Covid-19 Support and Recovery Fund closed on 30 October 2020, with a deadline for funds being used by 28 February 2021.

## Success of the Fund

This funding has been a direct part of supporting the community's response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The examples below demonstrate a wide range of different uses for the grant money; as well as the provision of food parcels, medications, activities and all manner of other things to help self-isolators and the vulnerable, projects supported also included mental health support and counselling, digital befriending and transformation of existing support services, Covid protection for refuges, online wellbeing platforms, volunteer support and a wealth of others under the initial Covid-19 Support Fund.

As the Covid-19 Recovery Fund came forward, many of these great examples continued alongside new applications for support around the costs of getting activities back up – adjustments to venues or ways of doing things, practical costs and thinking about how to get back together safely.

County Councillors drove this effort and have made a huge difference with the funding, with a final total grant awarded of £234,548 (out of a £279,000 total budget).

There was no financial minimum match funding for applications to the Covid-19 Support and Recovery Fund. Staffordshire's residents were already doing their bit, and the fund allowed county councillors to use their investment to help. Applications from across the county brought to the table a huge amount of voluntary activity, and support from the communities around them – for example, **Winshill Together** in Burton had received donations of huge amounts of food from local businesses for their food parcels activity, and used county councillor funding to go further.



The response by small-scale grassroots organisations across Staffordshire was significant. Over 200 different organisations received support from the fund, many of them very recently set up. Many others were organisations who existed pre-Covid and rapidly adjusted their focus – sometimes this was about groups such as Scouts and Guides troops switching to online provision for their members, but other examples saw groups changing what they did so that they could support the vulnerable around them.

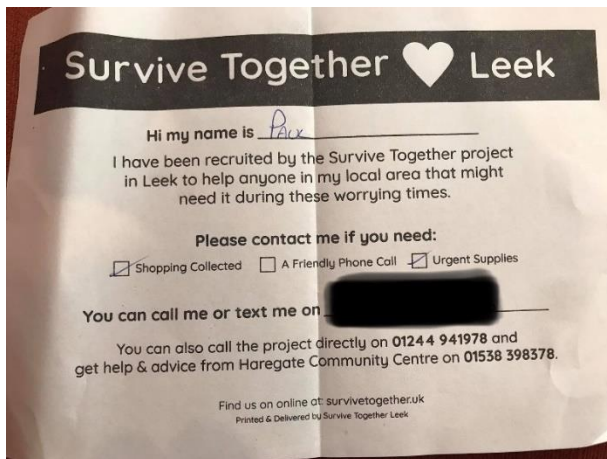
There are fantastic stories to tell across the county, and the examples below are only a small proportion:

Many groups who the fund supported used their funding to provide welfare support to self-isolators, in the form of food parcels, medications, or even activity packs.

- In Lichfield, the **Help for the High Risk** project supported high risk, self-isolating, shielding and single parents in Lichfield in any way they needed, and making regular welfare calls to check in with the individuals.
- In other areas, projects formed around a local hub like the local community centre, such as the **Chesterton Street Champions** who formed around the Red Street Community Centre in Newcastle, which also involved local volunteers from Chesterton Salvation Army and Chesterton Primary School helping to supply people in isolation or need due to furlough or job losses. The Community Cupboard at Haregate Community Centre included the **Food for Endon** project which used the funding to focus on bags of fruit and vegetables for the vulnerable.



- Once groups had established, some projects saw them focusing on the impacts of school holidays, such as **Survive Together** who distributed care packages to families with children on free school meals and vulnerable, isolated or shielding people/families throughout the summer holidays, alongside entertainment/education packs and emotional and practical support for the community to aid mental well-being.



- Often, existing groups changed what they were providing to adapt for the pandemic, such as Wade Street Church who adapted their weekly lunch club to a **Lockdown Lunch Club** via home delivery, so that the members of the club could keep in contact. They saw the positive impacts in the feedback from the club members.

- Many parish councils were at the heart of the local community response, such as in Perton where the Parish Council managed the **Perton Community Support Hub** in conjunction with the Church at Perton.

Some of these newly-established groups rapidly grew, and had the support of massive numbers of volunteers locally. They used county councillor funding to help establish, grow and use this support network.

- **Enville and Kinver Kobra** used the funding to build on the support network they had created and go significantly further with new activities and competitions to keep people connected, safe, active and stimulated during the lockdown.
- As time went on, groups began to get established to carry on the work started by the initial response. One example was the **Barton Neighbourhood Volunteers**, who picked up on work started by the local Parish Council and used councillor funding to make themselves more sustainable and established, so that they could continue the support that many villagers needed.

Many of the groups receiving support were focused on provision of activities and things to keep people active, mentally engaged and feeling well.

- **Hidden Warriors CIC** used funding to produce and distribute activity packs for children aged 3-11 years old, while Fradswell Community Hub's **Boredom Beater Bags** helped to keep people entertained as part of the wider Fradswell Community SOS project.
- **Family Action** used councillor funding to focus on support for families who would just about manage during normal times, in recognition that the pressure on families was dramatically higher during the impact of the pandemic. Using member funding, 0-11 Covid Survival Packs were distributed to families across four districts to maintain their health, wellbeing, resilience and independence, with significant amounts of match funding being raised to cover the approach for all families who needed it.



Packing of the 0-11 years COVID-19 Survival Packs took place on 30<sup>th</sup> April and the 1<sup>st</sup> May 2020 at Silkmore Children's Centre. All 1551 packs were then collected by the Family Support Providers on the 4<sup>th</sup> May for delivery out in the community that week.



- Some organisations set up new projects in response to Covid-19. Renew Church's **Here to Hear** project used councillor funding to establish a phone/video listening service to help those affected by Covid-19, because they found that increased issues such as loneliness, anger, depression and anxiety were on the rise due to isolation.



- Existing charities and organisations with specific focuses had to adapt how they provided support to the people they help. **Rockspur CIC** supported their members with monthly activity packs designed to maintain skill levels, engage and motivate people, and importantly to keep them still connected with their peer group. The **Childhood Cancer Parents Alliance** received funding support to deliver treat packages to the families they work with at a very difficult time. **Approach Dementia Support** used funding for online training for carers and carer wellbeing health checks, an important part of their work that had to shift online at short notice.

An important use of the Covid-19 Support and Recovery Fund was to help voluntary and community sector organisations to survive the pandemic, so that they are still there to get going again once it is over. Often, groups and venues have lost revenue or ways to fundraise due to stopped activity.

- Many community centres and halls such as **Featherstone and Hilton Community Centre** received support from the fund to cover overheads during a time when the hall could not raise funding through normal renting out etc.
- Charities such as **Borderland Voices** in Staffordshire Moorlands received support to cover their overheads on existing premises for which they were still liable, while delivering their provision over Zoom and through the post.



From July onwards the additional use for the fund of Covid-19 recovery activity was included, as groups started to explore new ways of delivering.

- MHA Communities Burntwood's **Covid-19 Recovery** project recognised that many activities would remain closed, but offered services within Covid-19 safe perimeters. Councillor funding went towards volunteer training for socially distanced one-to-one befriending, telephone IT support focused on online shopping, and posted guidance around using PPE like masks safely, to support people being able to use amenities safely and confidently.

- Pennymoor Association Trust had to make physical changes to **Pennymoor Community Centre** in order to meet the ventilation requirements demanded by the 'new normal', and councillor funding helped to invest in this.



- Madeley White Star FC had already made substantial changes, and funding helped them to continue to meet Covid safety and social distancing requirements at their **Manor Road** venue.

These are just some of the examples, and the rest can be viewed on the Staffordshire County Council website at

<https://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/Coronavirus/Help-and-support/COVID-19-Support-Fund/COVID-19-support-fund.aspx>.



## **Next steps**

The impacts of Covid-19 have not yet gone away. There remains a need for county councillors to be able to support communities around dealing with these impacts, with a broad remit so that the funding can be used as it is needed locally.

However, the situation has changed since March 2020, and we are no longer seeing a sudden national lockdown. While some residents do still need to self-isolate, the mechanisms for supporting them are now well established, and there are also other funding streams which are specifically about groups who provide support to those people. Additionally, many other community groups have already been through the first steps of 'recovery' and putting in place their practical steps for getting going again.

This is why the member fund for 2021/22 financial year, called the 2021 Community Fund, is aimed at helping our voluntary and community sector think about 'where next'. Now that we may be adapting to a new normal, the 2021 Community Fund is about supporting groups to think about their future offer, how they will fundraise, and how they will return to ideas which they were going to pursue before the pandemic began.

In future when the timing is right, we will consider the benefits of moving back to a more targeted focus for the funding, but it is recognised that in 2021, what is needed most is investment to get our communities thriving again.

## **Conclusion**

The Covid-19 Support and Recovery Fund was a successful element of Staffordshire's response to the pandemic. As part of a much bigger picture of other funders, agencies and volunteers working together, over £230k was distributed to help community organisations look after those who needed it most. This year we will build on that success with a focus on sustained recovery and future planning, with councillors using their fund to help groups get back to doing what they love.

