

# Understanding the needs of Hertfordshire's voluntary sector 2021



**Working with the voluntary sector  
towards recovery**

## Understanding need in Hertfordshire 2021

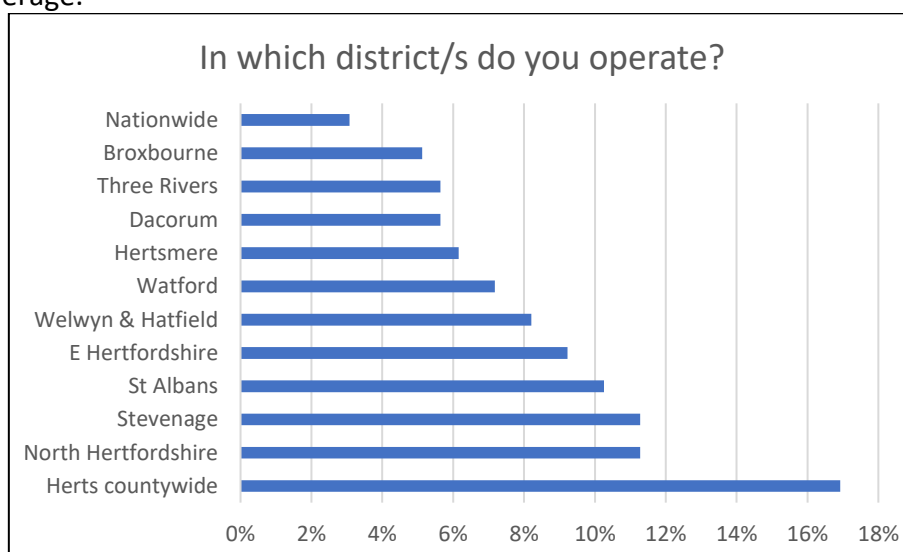
### Survey headlines and results

In July 2021, HCF conducted a second voluntary sector survey to better understand the emerging needs of local groups and organisations. The aim of the survey was to understand changing need in Hertfordshire as we emerge from multiple lockdowns and continue the journey to Covid-19 recovery. The survey also provided an opportunity to better understand the impact of HCF’s grant-making in 2021/21 and what support the sector needs in order to become more resilient. We were particularly interested to understand any developments since HCF conducted a survey in May 2020 during the initial phase of the Covid-19 outbreak.

The findings will help to inform HCF’s grant making and develop further local philanthropy. Our thanks go to everyone who took the time to complete the survey.

### Responding organisations

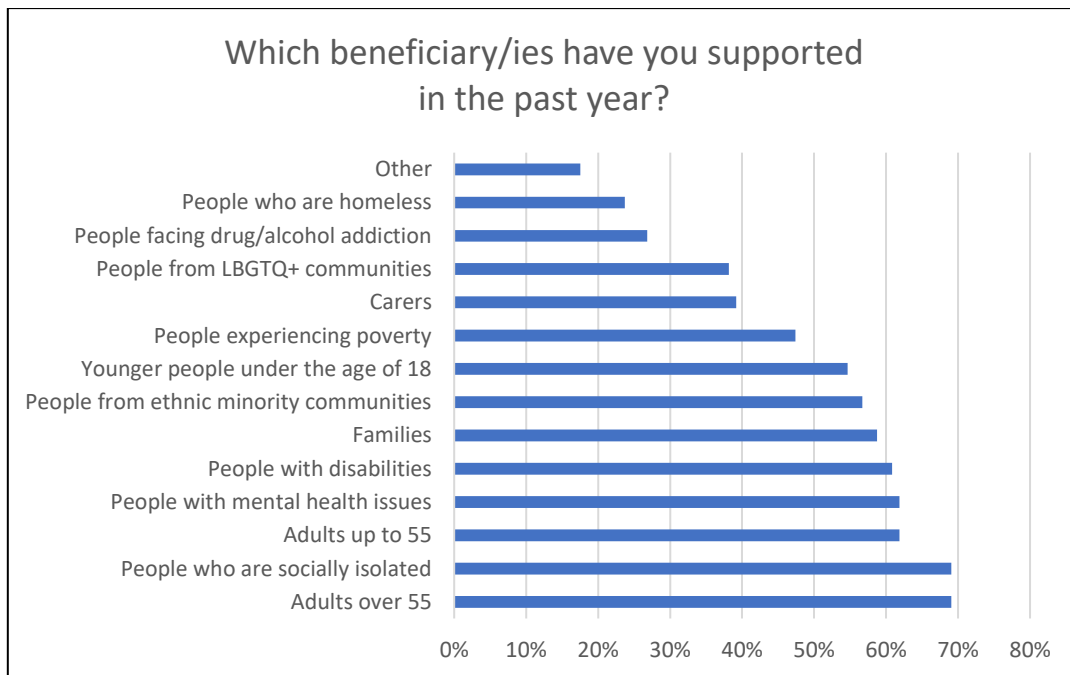
- Of the 97 respondents 34% provided county-wide services and 6% provided national coverage.



- Those responding represented organisations that work across a wide range of beneficiary groups, supporting people of all ages in the community with a variety of needs. Many organisations support more than one beneficiary group and there was good representation across 13 different beneficiary groups.
- Adults over 55 years old and people who are socially isolated were represented by 69% of responding organisations and were the beneficiary groups with highest representation. People with mental health issues and adults up to 55 years were

represented by 62% of organisations which was the second highest level of representation.

- Beneficiaries with the least representation were those facing drug and/or alcohol addiction who were represented by 27% of organisations and people who are homeless who were represented by 23% organisations.

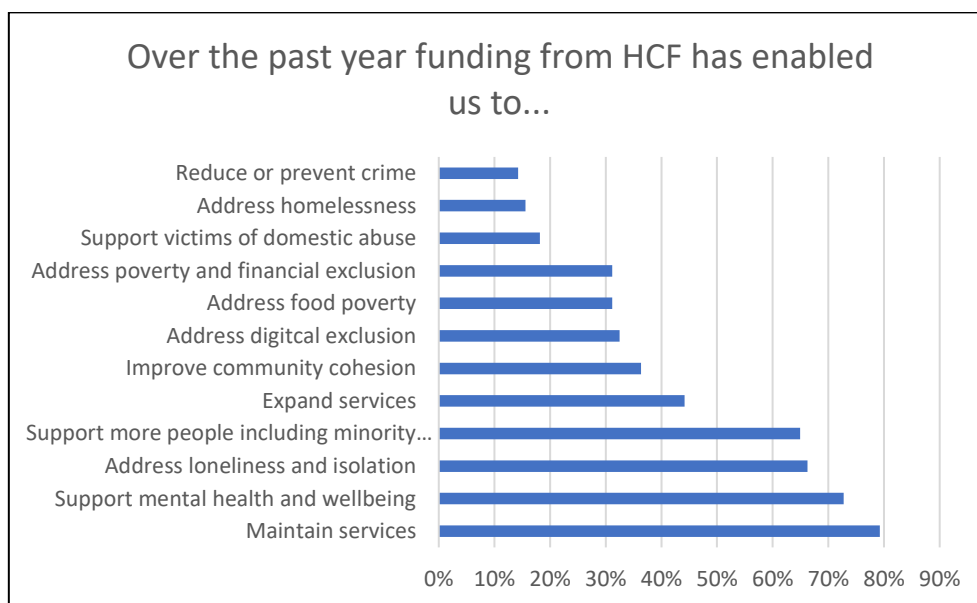


### The impact of HCF’s grant-making

- 77% of those responding had received a grant or grants from HCF since the start of the pandemic. 28% had received grants of up to £4,999, 21% between £5,000 and £9,999 and 29% had received a grant of £10,000 or more. 56% of organisations reported that securing funding from HCF over the past year was essential to their work, 22% said that it was helpful, with only 2% stating that it was not essential.
- 75% of organisations told us how many beneficiaries they have been able to help as a result of HCF’s recent grant funding. In total, **organisations told us that they had supported more than 57,000 beneficiaries**. Whilst we recognise that it is not a definitive number, it provides a good estimate of the minimum number of people that have benefitted from local support funded by HCF’s grant-making.
- The total number of beneficiaries supported by respondents ranged from 5 to 9,995 with an average of 784 beneficiaries per organisation. This wide range in beneficiaries reflects the broad spectrum of groups supported by HCF including start-ups and long established organisations.
- 79% of organisations told us that HCF’s funding had enabled them to ‘maintain their services’ at a time when the voluntary and community sector faced unprecedented challenges. **65% reported that it had enabled them to reach and support more**

people including underrepresented groups and 44% said that it had enabled them to expand their services.

- **HCF’s grant funding enabled 73% of organisations to support mental health and wellbeing, 66% to address loneliness and social isolation and 18% to support victims of domestic abuse** - all of which have also been recognised nationally as emerging needs.
- Organisations also told us that grant funding had enabled them to develop partnerships, provide bereavement support, support adults and children with special needs, support new parents, enable non-resident parents to meet with their children and support those suffering with addiction.

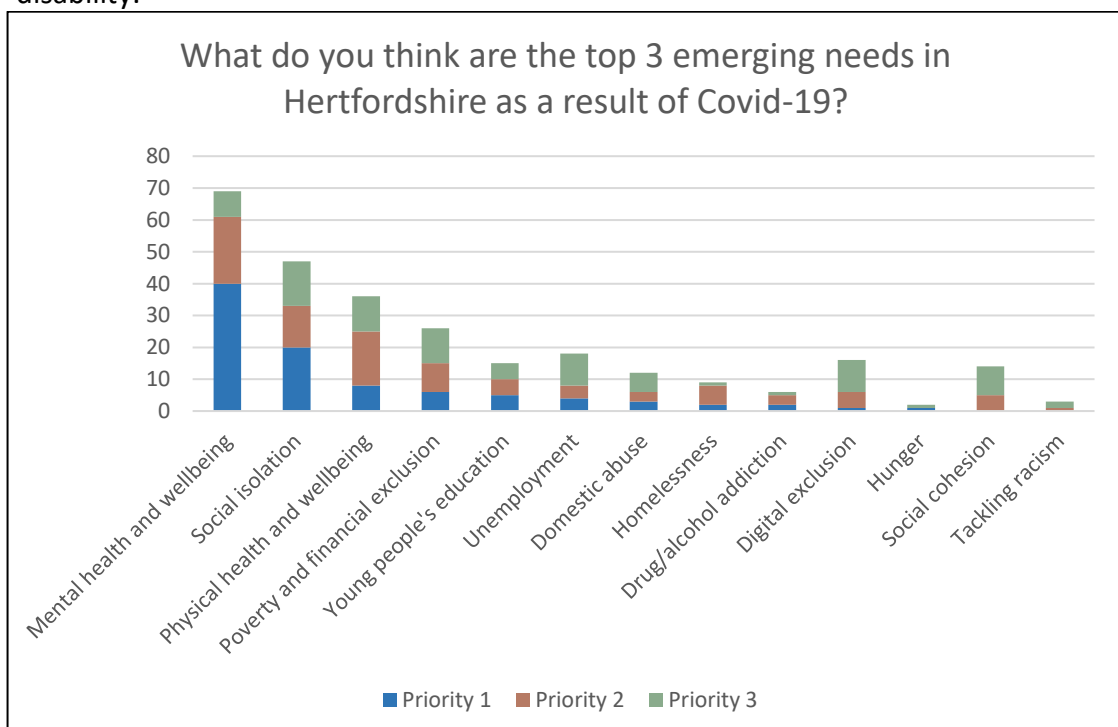


- We asked the organisations to tell us about the impact of HCF’s funding on their work and beneficiaries. Organisations told us that **funding had enabled them to tackle the immediate challenges that the pandemic presented as well as enabling longer term development.**
- A number of organisations told us that funding had enabled them to keep delivering much needed services throughout lockdown and to reach the most vulnerable beneficiaries within our communities.
- Organisations that had utilised funding to purchase IT equipment said that it had been vital in facilitating the move to remote working. It enabled teams to stay connected with each other as well as delivering online or phone-based services to support their beneficiaries and reduce social isolation.
- Others told us that they have utilised the funding to help them to transition back to face-to-face delivery as we moved out of lockdown, including adapting their workspaces to facilitate Covid-safe working.

- Funding also helped organisations to respond to emerging needs, pilot new projects, increase the number of beneficiaries they support and reach new beneficiaries - including engaging underrepresented communities.
- With regards to emergency funding, organisations told us that this has helped them to address food and digital poverty, reduce social isolation, support more people through information sharing, advocacy and case work and much more.
- Smaller organisations told us that they are always on the financial breadline and that HCF enables them to provide specific, structured services.
- With regards to organisational development, organisations told us that funding has helped them to improve their skills and their ability to deliver high quality services.

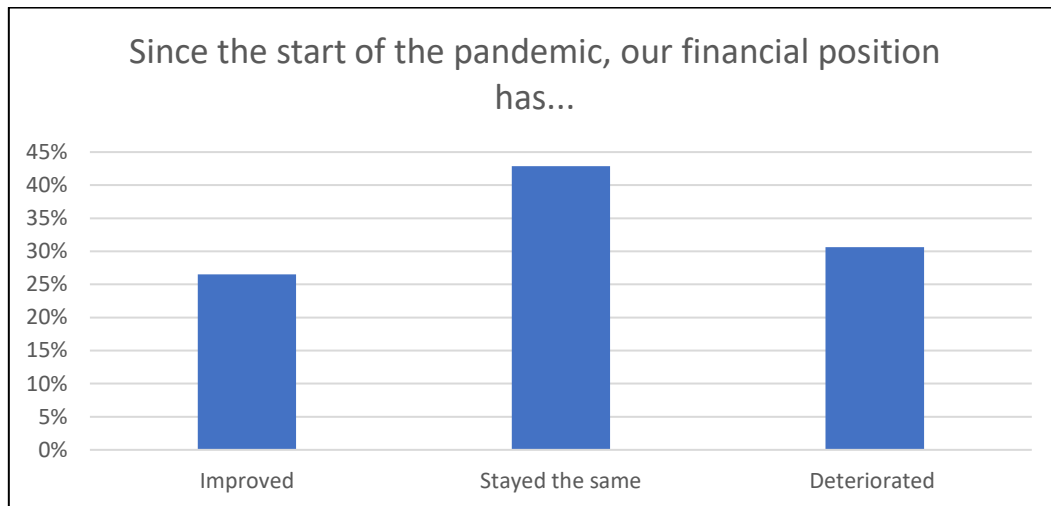
### Emerging needs

- **Over 70% of organisations expect demand for their services to increase following the removal of most Covid restrictions** while 20% expect demand to stay the same and 9% expect to see a decrease.
- We asked organisations what they thought the priority emerging needs would be as Hertfordshire begins to recover from the impact of Covid-19. **The top three priority needs were identified as mental health and wellbeing, social isolation and physical health and wellbeing.**
- Respondents were also asked to highlight additional emerging needs that they had identified. These included developmental delays in babies and toddlers born during lockdown, suicide prevention, discrimination against special needs adults and children, an increase in the number of women as the non-resident parent and neuro disability.



## Financial challenges

- We asked organisations to tell us about the state of their financial position 15 months on from the start of the pandemic. **43% of organisations said that their financial position had remained the same. 31% said that their financial position had deteriorated and 26% said that it had improved.**



- **Based on their current financial position, 68% of organisations reported that they could remain viable for more than 12 months, 26% said between 6 and 12 months and 7% said less than 6 months.**
- **66% of organisations said that they were facing reduced income and 33% said that their reserves are decreasing.** 3% said that they would need to consider making staff redundant, 22% of organisations will be relying on volunteers to reduce staffing costs and 5% told us that they are facing significant challenges which means that they will have to consider closure. On a more positive note, 14% of organisations said that they expected income to increase, 8% expected to see an increase in their reserves and 35% of organisations plan to expand their team.



## Operational challenges

- Organisations told us that they are **struggling to juggle the conflicting priorities of maintaining day-to-day delivery of their services with the need to focus on strategic development and achieving long-term sustainability**. Many are experiencing uncertainty with regards to income and this makes planning difficult.
- Some organisations told us that **they face being swamped by need as demand for their services continues to grow** due to the knock-on effects of Covid and lockdown on their beneficiaries. For others, the pandemic has changed their delivery profile which may require them to restructure.
- Some organisations have not delivered any services since the start of lockdown and they are understandably nervous about when, how and if they can rebuild their services moving forward.
- Organisations told us that **one of the barriers to being able to re-launch services is the lack of access to appropriate venues** to enable them to deliver services in a safe and stable manner. Many organisations deliver services within the community and, with a number of community venues remaining closed, competition for space is high. Others highlighted the financial burden of managing their own premises which meant they continued to incur maintenance costs while the building was not in use or that they need to invest in capital developments in order to make the building fit for purpose.
- Whilst the number of volunteers increased overall during the pandemic, some organisations lost part or all of their volunteer network due to reasons such as services closing and the risk to older and vulnerable volunteers preventing them from volunteer safely etc. **Some organisations need to replace volunteers that have moved on and others need to recruit new volunteers to cope with increased demand for their services or to help address gaps in staffing.**

## Building resilience

- **69% of organisations stated that fundraising support would help them to build resilience**. Smaller organisations often don't have a dedicated fundraiser and organisations told us that they would benefit from more strategic fundraising support in order to achieve long-term objectives.
- **51% of organisations identified that forming partnerships and collaborations was important**. Many organisations noted that partnership working had increased as a result of the pandemic and they recognised that it continues to be a priority moving forward. Networks and forums were seen as playing a key role in enabling organisations to build relationships and identify opportunities for collaboration.
- **43% of organisations said that marketing advice would help them build resilience**. Support with digital marketing (particularly social media and websites), engaging with the press, writing case studies and producing marketing literature were all identified as skills that organisations were keen to develop.

- Staff training and volunteer training both received an equal number of responses with 33% of organisations reporting that training would help develop their team and enable their organisations to become more resilient.
- **Board training received the least amount of responses overall with 16% of organisations reporting that this that would help them build resilience.** Training needs were identified around trustee roles and responsibilities, team building and building board effectiveness. Organisations also told us that it was difficult to recruit and retain trustees.
- **33% of organisations said that wellbeing support for staff and volunteers would help build resilience.** Organisations recognised that some staff are suffering from, or at risk of suffering from, burnout. This was particularly highlighted by organisations that said they are experiencing increasing demand for their services. Others recognised that remote working has impacted on staff with some needing support to develop the confidence to get back to delivering services face-to-face. Organisations felt that a focus on mental health and wellbeing was a positive thing and identified mental health first aid training, wellbeing toolkits, making more time available to support volunteers, team building and access to a wellbeing budget as some of the things that would help them address wellbeing within their organisations.
- **26% said that legal or HR advice would be helpful.** Some organisations said they found it difficult to find charity friendly services and that they struggled to cover costs.
- **23% said that strategic support would be helpful,** particularly with regards to business planning.

## Working with volunteers

- We asked organisations whether they planned to change the number of volunteers they work with moving forward. **77% of organisations plan to increase the number of volunteers they work with and 23% plan to work with the same number of volunteers.** No organisations plan to reduce the number of volunteers that they work with. This highlights the important role that volunteers play in supporting the voluntary and community sector to deliver services effectively.
- The pandemic resulted in an increase in the number of people volunteering in Hertfordshire and across the UK. At the height of the pandemic services providing emergency help, particularly practical support such as delivery of food packs and prescription collections, were especially successful in recruitment because many volunteers wanted to support services that had an immediate and evident impact on the lives of beneficiaries.
- **As the county emerged from each lockdown the number of active volunteers began to decrease as people returned to work or other commitments prevented them from continuing their roles.** In order to build on the volunteering legacy of the pandemic, organisations have highlighted the need to ensure that their recruitment



and retention practices are fit for purpose, continue to offer a range of volunteering opportunities, improve the marketing of their roles and recognise that there is a cost (time and resources) associated with managing and developing volunteers effectively.

### What can HCF do to support the voluntary and community sector over the next 12 to 24 months?

- Organisations stressed how important it is that HCF continues to provide funding to help support the sector to deliver services that benefit communities across Hertfordshire. **They see HCF as a trusted source of local funding** and urged HCF to ensure the voluntary and community sector is suitably resourced to continue its essential work.
- **Respondents encouraged HCF to continue to raise the profile of the voluntary and community sector with statutory partners, businesses, trusts and foundations.** Organisations want HCF to continue to keep them informed about local needs via the production of Hertfordshire Matters (HCF's needs analysis research) and by promoting funding and networking opportunities.
- **A high number of organisations recognised that partnership working will play a key role in ensuring the future success of their services.** They told us that they want to build strong and collaborative relationships across the sector and think that HCF could help to enable this by facilitating networking.
- With regards to networking, a number of organisations said that they would particularly welcome support to help them network effectively with businesses. Others would like support to access trusts and foundations with regards to identifying potential support and strategies to approach them.
- Whilst some responses focused on the help that organisations need to respond to the immediate challenges they face, others said that they would benefit from advice that helped them to look at long term development and how to expand sustainably.
- **Organisations also told us that they want HCF to continue to deliver training and development opportunities and identified project management and facilities management as areas of need.**

Our thanks go to everyone who contributed to this research.

*We would also like to take this opportunity to share some of the feedback we received. It means a lot to the team and our thanks go to all the groups who responded with agility, commitment and dedication in support of the people of Hertfordshire.*

*“HCF has been a God send through the pandemic and we would not have been able to open our doors without their support.”*

*“I have noticed that the HCF team have been more open during the pandemic. By that I mean that I have had more conversations about our work, our ambitions, our needs etc. The Foundation quite clearly understands the issues faced by the people we support, and the wider community.”*

*“HCF were incredibly supportive over the last 18 months and I thank them for all their time, advice and support which was so valuable during this time. Keep doing what you do!”*

*“The main support that HCF can provide is to remain the advocate for the VCS. HCF’s open and transparent approach, with robust processes and procedures in awarding grants, helps ensure VCS have the confidence in your funding / training protocol.”*