

2021-24

# Empowering Communities

BCP Council's Voluntary and Community Sector  
and Volunteering Strategy



[bpcouncil.gov.uk](https://bpcouncil.gov.uk)



# Foreword

**We are passionate about creating vibrant communities, with an outstanding quality of life, where everyone can play an active role and feel part of their local community. That is why we are committed to supporting our voluntary and community sector to thrive. We wish to enable everyone to feel confident to volunteer in a variety of ways, to help others in their communities across Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole.**

Over the last year we have seen the remarkably agile response of individuals, groups and organisations to come together and take action to help others. BCP Council recognises the longer-term impact that the COVID-19 pandemic will have on local people and organisations and is committed to helping strengthen our communities so that everyone feels safe, engaged and included. By working together with individuals, groups, organisations and partners across the local area, BCP Council is looking at ways to help local communities recover and flourish.

This voluntary and community sector and volunteering strategy outlines a set of priorities and key actions over the next three years to achieve this vision and create connected communities. Through consultation and engagement, we have listened to the views of residents, organisations and groups across Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole to help inform the strategy and develop ways that we can work together to help make a difference.

We look forward to working together to create a great place to live, work and visit.



**Councillor Drew Mellor,**  
Leader of BCP Council.

**Councillor Karen Rampton,**  
Portfolio holder for Adults.

**Councillor Jane Kelly,**  
Lead Member for Community Engagement.

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# 1. Executive summary



**The council's Voluntary and Community Sector and Volunteering Strategy 2021-2024 outlines our ambition to support a thriving, vibrant voluntary and community sector across Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole, along with our desire to put volunteering at the heart of our communities, ensuring there are diverse, accessible, rewarding opportunities to volunteer.**

The strategy details how we aim to achieve the vision through:

- ➔ A set of key principles and framework for how the council will work together with the voluntary and community sector to support local communities.
- ➔ Recognising the impact of COVID-19 and identifying ways to help communities to recover, as well as learning from the crisis response that brought some residents closer together.
- ➔ Developing a volunteering strategy that creates opportunities that are accessible and enable residents to play an active role in helping others and themselves, including through formal volunteering, neighbourliness, work experience and related opportunities.

The strategy is accompanied by a **three-year delivery plan**. It has been informed and developed through public consultation and stakeholder engagement with a range of organisations, community groups and individuals.

The strategy sets out the following priorities for how BCP Council will collaborate with a range of organisations, groups and individuals within communities to empower the voluntary and community sector and communities to thrive.

### **Priorities** for working with the voluntary and community sector to support connected vibrant communities

- 1** Build effective partnerships and working relationships that support stronger connected communities.
- 2** Extend the council's services by building capacity through specialist partners.
- 3** Learn from the COVID-19 community response and embrace new ways of working.
- 4** Help people to connect with their communities.
- 5** Support community-led approaches to build resilient communities.
- 6** Focus on early intervention and prevention to support people to avoid crisis.

The strategy defines how BCP Council will work with others to develop volunteering and social action opportunities which are accessible and enable everyone to be able to play an active role in helping each other and themselves. This strategy is not only focused on developing council-led opportunities but also working with the voluntary and community sector, faith communities, other statutory organisations, local businesses and other informal mechanisms to enable more people to join in.

### **Priorities** for developing volunteering opportunities and social action where everyone can play an active role to help others

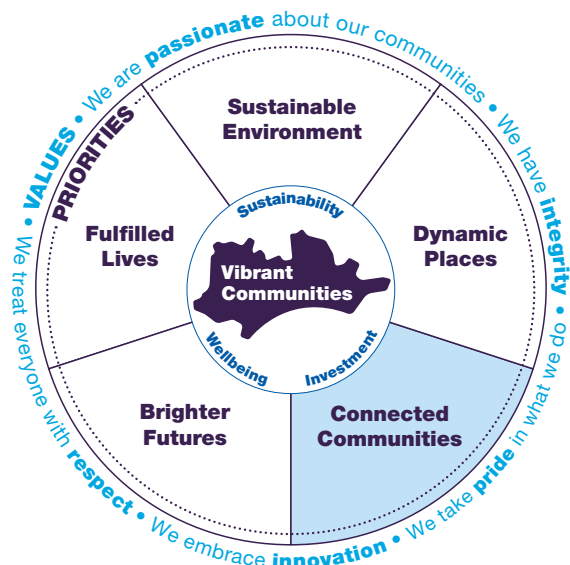
- v1** Recognising the value and promoting the benefits of volunteering.
- v2** Enhancing accessibility, choice and diversity.
- v3** Providing positive and rewarding volunteering experiences.
- v4** Bringing communities together to volunteer and enable social action.
- v5** Engaging employers and business leaders to play their part.
- v6** Developing a more joined up approach to volunteering within the council.

## 2. Introduction



### Our vision

As part of BCP Council's Big Plan and the Corporate Strategy, we are committed to developing vibrant communities, with an outstanding quality of life, where everyone plays an active role.



Our vision is to ensure that the area is a vibrant, connected community which provides meaningful opportunities for volunteering and empowers a thriving voluntary and community sector to help support community needs.

### What is a vibrant connected community?

We believe a vibrant connected community is one where:

- A range of active voluntary and community sector organisations and community groups exist and are able to provide support to meet community needs.
- Voluntary and community sector organisations and groups feel stable, strong and sustainable.
- There are strong partnerships and networks that work closely together to tackle community needs through joined up approaches between organisations, groups and individuals.
- Residents are able to lead active, healthy and independent lives for longer.
- Residents are taking part and participating in local community activities.
- Residents are helping others through volunteering and social action.
- Residents feel supported and encouraged to have more control over their lives and their communities.

## Purpose of the strategy

In order to create vibrant communities everyone needs to play their part. We need to bring individuals, communities and networks closer together to better understand local community needs and share knowledge, expertise and resources to co-design and empower communities to become more resilient and find solutions to meet their needs.

With the ongoing challenges of austerity, budget cuts and pressure on resources across our communities, alongside the increasing demand on services and complexity of needs, we now, more than ever need to work together to find new and innovative ways to help support those most vulnerable in our communities. The council is transforming its operations and services alongside local voluntary and community sector organisations, to find new ways to collaborate, fund and deliver services to meet community needs.

This strategy outlines the framework and a set of priorities that we believe are important for how we can work together to help communities and the voluntary and community sector to thrive. It includes a comprehensive three-year delivery plan, detailing how we will work together with communities and a broad range of organisations and groups, to deliver against these key priorities.

### **The strategy is underpinned by the Council's following values:**

- Empower communities to co-design and deliver services.
- Create inclusive environments where everyone feels they are able to participate.
- Enable residents to take responsibility for their own outcomes.
- Lead and collaborate with partners to deliver better outcomes and efficiencies.

## Informing the strategy

The strategy has been developed by listening to the views and feedback received through public consultation, and further stakeholder engagement with voluntary and community sector organisations, the community, faith groups and individuals. The full report is available at: [haveyoursay.bcpccouncil.gov.uk](https://haveyoursay.bcpccouncil.gov.uk)





# 3. The voluntary and community sector



## Definition: **Voluntary and community sector (VCS)**

“Organisations whose primary purpose is to create social impact rather than profit.

This sector is independent from local and national government, and distinct from the private sector. It is critical in extending the support available to vulnerable residents through a variety of organisations and groups, such as charities, community groups, charitable incorporated organisations, resident groups and community associations, social enterprises, non-constituted groups of residents, faith communities and others”. [Reach Volunteering](#)

With at least 2,600 voluntary and community sector groups across the BCP area, there is a broad range of organisations that is incredibly diverse in size and nature. These include well established and newly forming groups and organisations and together, they all contribute to the vibrancy of our communities by bringing people together for a common cause and engaging them in positive action.

## Definition: **Volunteering**

“Any activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the environment or someone (individuals or groups) other than, or in addition to, close relatives. Central to this definition is the fact that volunteering must be a choice freely made by each individual.” [National Council for Voluntary Organisations](#)

**Social action** is about people coming together to help improve their lives and solve the problems that are important in their communities. It involves people giving their time and other resources for the common good, in a range of forms – from volunteering and community-owned services to community organising or simple neighbourly acts.



# Size of the Voluntary and Community Sector

## Nationally



**163,000**  
charities<sup>(1)</sup>

there are approximately  
163,000 charities in the UK



**21 million**  
volunteers<sup>(1)</sup>

there are more than  
21 million volunteers that  
help UK charities



**£23.9bn**  
per year<sup>(1)</sup>

the estimated value  
of volunteer work is  
£23.9 billion per year



**£12.2bn**  
UK economy<sup>(1)</sup>

they add £12.2bn  
to the UK economy

## Locally in BCP area (April 2021)



**657**  
general registered  
charities<sup>(1)</sup>

with a combined income of  
£407m (if exclude RNLI, £215m)



**70,347**  
regularly  
volunteer<sup>(1)</sup>

(22% of the total population)



**11**  
million hours<sup>(4)</sup>

total number of hours given  
per year (median of 8 hours  
per person per month)



**10%**  
contribution  
to GDP<sup>(5)</sup>



**2,600+**  
voluntary and  
community  
sector groups<sup>(2)</sup>



**115,115**  
people volunteer  
at least  
once a year<sup>(1)</sup>

(36% of the total population)



**£150.3**  
million<sup>(3)</sup>

replacement cost per year  
(applying 2018 median wage  
of £13.60/hour)



<sup>(1)</sup> NCVO Civil Society Almanac 2020

<sup>(2)</sup> 'Below the Radar' Third Sector Research Centre, 2011

<sup>(3)</sup> BCP Council Economic Overview

<sup>(4)</sup> NCVO, Time Well Spent

<sup>(5)</sup> Pro Bono Economics: Undervalued and overlooked? The need for better understanding civil society's contribution to the UK economy, May 2020.



## 4. The impact of COVID-19



Since the pandemic emerged in the UK in 2020, we have seen the significant way in which it has impacted on our communities and changed people's lives through bereavement, health conditions, job losses, change in family circumstances and many other ways. Most notably we have seen how the pandemic has impacted on people's mental health and isolation, whether as a result of shielding, through the various lockdowns or due to the scale of the crisis which none of us have experienced before. This has increased the demand on crisis services provided through the council, its partners and the VCS, but undoubtedly the true scale of the impact of the pandemic is still to be realised.

Throughout the pandemic, in addition to formal volunteering with organisations, there was an overwhelming 'neighbourly' response that emerged from within our communities in order to support people who needed help. Volunteers and local community groups stepped in to help out with tasks such as shopping for others, cooking or phoning someone feeling lonely or isolated. Through this strategy we want to encourage and support those connections to continue to thrive within communities and become part of the 'new normal'.

In addition, statutory organisations worked together with the VCS to help individuals through the crisis through the Together We Can programme. The VCS demonstrated its ability to adapt and respond quickly to address the new needs of the community and work in partnership with the council and others to lead on the community response. However, the pandemic has dramatically affected the sector, with many concerned about funding, sustainability and increased demand on services and resources that adds pressure.

Community Action Network (CAN) is a local charity that provides professional and practical support to the voluntary sector in Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole. CAN provided support to the VCS throughout the pandemic. They recently carried out a survey with local VCS and gathered further insight from 41 organisations across the area on the state of the sector.



## **Key findings of the State of the Sector survey** (summer 2021 results)

41% of organisations furloughed one or more members of staff at some point over the last 16 months, and 17% had to make staff redundant.

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Many are worried about future funding and sustainability of their organisation.

27% of respondents have seen a significant drop in their funding through the pandemic, with 36% of those organisations having lost up to 50% of their income due to not being able to trade, community fundraise or have seen their grant funding diverted due to COVID-19.

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About half (51%) of organisations said that they are at risk of permanent closure within 12 months if funding is not made available to them, with three organisations at risk of imminent closure.

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59% had volunteers that were shielding due to their age or health conditions, and 15% had to close or reduce services as a result. However, 7% of organisations have managed to recruit new volunteers through the pandemic.

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The sector quickly adapted to the restrictions, with 29% changing the way they delivered their services, such as to online/virtual and had never been as busy, with nearly half (46%) seeing a significant increase in demand on their services since the start of the pandemic.

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Around a third (35%) have seen an increase of need up to 50% of their pre-pandemic numbers. To meet demand and the changes in need all VCS groups have had to adapt. This has been positive for many organisations with 75% of groups now expecting to continue to deliver these services as the country begins to move into recovery. However, 56% of the 31 organisations who wish to continue their expanded services will need to access funding to enable this.

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## 5. Working with VCS in the BCP area



As described in section 3, the local VCS is diverse and made up of a range of organisations and groups that vary in size, culture, operational models and focus areas.

A thriving VCS will be one that:

- Grows and shrinks depending on need and demand.
- Can attract the resources it needs to make the biggest difference it can.
- Is independent, recognised and respected.
- Has a clear voice to articulate its views and needs.
- Works collaboratively with others within the VCS and other sectors.
- Is seen as an equal partner.

Not only does the sector need to be thriving but so do the individual organisations within it. To be a thriving, sustainable organisation, groups need to be as efficient and effective as possible and attract support and resources and be able to demonstrate outcomes that show they make a difference and create change. Therefore, for a thriving VCS there needs to be:

- Seed funding for new groups and initiatives.
- Quick and easy access to set up advice and support
- Expert advice and support on funding, operational and legal requirements of running a group.
- Affordable places to meet, especially for new groups.
- A platform for them to attract volunteers and committee members/trustees, and appropriate advice to manage/support them.
- A platform for groups to communicate and collaborate with each other, those in other sectors and local residents.
- A representative body to advocate and speak on its behalf.

BCP Council recognises the VCS can often be best placed to provide services that support communities with their specialist skills and experience and an effective voice. The diverse nature of organisations and groups that exist provides focused support in particular areas of need or specific groups of people within our society. We want to continue to build on these networks, partnerships and collaborative ways of working in order to respond to evolving needs within our communities. We need to be dynamic, innovative and open minded in our approaches to transform the way services are designed and delivered to meet increasing demand.



The responses from the public consultation alongside feedback from a variety of organisations and groups, coupled with our existing work and knowledge, has led to us defining the following priorities for how we would like to work with the voluntary and community sector across Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole.

### **Priorities for working with the voluntary and community sector to support connected vibrant communities**

- 1** Building effective partnerships and working relationships that support stronger connected communities.
- 2** Extend the council's services by building capacity through specialist partners.
- 3** Learn from the COVID-19 community response and embrace new ways of working.
- 4** Help people to connect with their communities.
- 5** Support community-led approaches to build resilient communities.
- 6** Focus on early intervention and prevention to support people to avoid crisis.

#### **Priority 1 Build effective partnerships and working relationships that support stronger connected communities**

BCP Council works in partnership with a broad range of organisations and groups to address community issues, such as supporting those experiencing food insecurity, social isolation and loneliness or those living with dementia. These partnerships are diverse in nature in terms of their working relationships; the types of representatives involved and how actions are achieved and delivered. Without the work of the sector, there would be far more challenges and higher demand on council services.

Partnerships should be built on open communication and a commitment to work together to achieve common goals that meet the needs of the community. Through partnership working we can share knowledge, expertise and resources to avoid duplication of services and create more joined up approaches to more effectively provide services and support. The majority of the consultation respondents (94%) agreed that partnership approaches are important to help support community needs.

The preceding councils had 'Compact' agreements which are agreements between the local authority and the VCS. The Compacts set out key principles for how the local authority and the VCS work together that improves their relationship and is mutually beneficial. This agreement is about setting a framework and standards to work towards, which supports and empowers the sector to flourish. We will co-design a new partnership agreement for the Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole area with representatives from the VCS to outline our approach to working effectively together.

The strategy aims to increase broader participation in partnerships from across the whole community. It encourages further engagement with groups other than the ‘usual suspects’, so that the resulting framework has the capacity to support emerging community groups and enterprises.

We value the role of the private sector in contributing to societies, through corporate social responsibility agendas and businesses that want to give back to communities and support local causes. We need to work more closely with the sector to identify opportunities and connections where the private sector is able to channel their resource and support more effectively to meet the needs in our communities.

This strategy continues to identify ways to bring communities together. For example, the existing BCP Council Community Equality Champions Network provides an opportunity to link with local faith leaders and others to work together to look at ways to better support those most vulnerable in our communities.

### Through this strategy and delivery plan we will:

- Continue to facilitate and support partnerships with the voluntary and community sector to tackle local community issues.
- Strengthen and extend existing partnerships to involve a broader range of more organisations, groups and support to include representatives from public, private, VCS, community and faith groups and residents.
- Create more opportunities for co-design and solidify partnership working that values the input of all parties.
- Develop a partnership agreement with the VCS through a co-design process.

## Priority 2 Extend the council's services by building capacity through specialist partners

### Funding specialist organisations

BCP Council funds specialist VCS organisations to provide services to support local communities. This helps to extend the breadth and depth of services that exist for residents. As an example, Citizens Advice Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole receive a grant to provide information and advice services to help residents with issues such as debt and money challenges, tackling hate crime and discrimination.

BCP Council also invests in supporting and building capacity within the VCS. It provides a grant to Community Action Network (CAN) who provide professional expertise, practical services and a platform for promoting and sharing volunteering opportunities. CAN help groups set up, speak up on their behalf to ensure they have a say in the local community, support them to network, and give them the tools and knowledge they need to grow and thrive. The majority of the consultation responses (86%) agreed with the council's approach

to help fund such organisations and the majority (75%) were aware of CAN, especially those aged between 55 and 64 years. BCP Council will work with VCS organisations to help train council staff to better understand and support a range of communities and recognise the needs of different protected characteristics groups.

### **Additional resources to the sector**

Consultation respondents were asked if there are other ways that they would like to see the council work with partners and local groups to empower the voluntary and community sector. The most prevalent themes were to provide more support and resource, promotion and engagement with volunteers and the community, as well as create more joined up approaches through stronger networking.

In addition to providing grants to specialist organisations to deliver services, BCP Council are investing in other ways to help the sector become more sustainable. The council established BH Coastal Lottery as a platform that enables local good causes to raise money for their organisation through the sale of lottery tickets for a weekly draw. 60% of the funding from the ticket goes the local good causes. In addition, the BH Coastal Lottery Small Grant Scheme provides small grants to local good causes of up to £500.

The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Neighbourhood Portion is a fund generated from new housing developments for reinvestment back into improving local community facilities. This provides an opportunity to invest in bids from residents, businesses and community groups to support local projects which will improve, benefit and shape the development of their community for the future.

The council has established a Living Legacy Grant Scheme with local charity Dorset Community Foundation which provides grants of up to £5,000 to local voluntary and community sector organisations. This funding is for projects that help to achieve the outcomes contained within the Corporate Plan.

The Public Services Social Value Act requires public services commissioners to consider the social, economic and environmental benefits of a contract. This means commissioners need to think about whether the services they are going to buy, or the way they are going to buy them, could secure these benefits for their area or stakeholders. It encourages commissioners to talk to their local provider market or community to design better services, often finding new and innovative solutions to difficult problems. Commissioning officers should allow sufficient time for the procurement process including early engagement/ pre-engagement with the sector as part of commissioning services. Services need to be commissioned through coproduction with local organisations and groups to be inclusive and accessible.

## Through this strategy and delivery plan we will:

- Provide financial support to infrastructure and operational partners so that the council can leverage their expertise to extend the service and support available to local residents.
- Promote the work of the voluntary and community sector more broadly within the council and across partnerships to strengthen understanding of the work of specialist partners and their areas of expertise and support available.
- Create opportunities to share best practice to inspire more innovation and effective ways of working across partnerships.
- Create a deeper understanding of community needs through the expertise, knowledge and support provided by the voluntary and community sector.
- Provide small grants scheme to local organisations to help fund projects that help to support our communities.

## Priority 3 Learn from the community response to COVID-19 and embrace new ways of working

BCP Council led the Together We Can (TWC) community resilience response programme in partnership with the VCS and other partners to provide a co-ordinated response to the pandemic. TWC's role was to ensure that shielding, vulnerable or self-isolating residents had access to food, essential supplies and support during the pandemic. Working in partnership with CAN we developed a volunteer response programme to support the TWC helpline. As the implications of the pandemic were revealed, we saw a wave of people step forward to volunteer for TWC, with nearly 3,000 people signing up through CAN and this has supported thousands of residents across Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole.

Responses to the consultation confirmed that 70% of respondents are aware of the TWC and most (94%) agreed that these types of partnership approaches are important to help support the needs of our communities. In addition, 69% agreed that the council has embraced better ways of working with voluntary and community sector in its response to COVID-19.

The rapid response to the pandemic formed opportunities for creative and innovative ways of working with the VCS. It saw a shift to greater shared ownership between partners that empowered the sector in its response. VCS organisations and groups showed their ability to adapt quickly to change, building on trusted relationships and networks to respond to community needs. This strategy aims to sustain and build upon the momentum achieved during the pandemic, both through increased volunteering, as well as how we worked more closely and collaboratively with the voluntary and community sector to achieve joint outcomes.



As outlined in section 4, the pandemic has had a dramatic impact on our communities and the state of the voluntary and community sector. This strategy will focus on supporting those negatively impacted and help communities to recover through a number of ways.

### Through this strategy and delivery plan we will:

- Work with the VCS to understand the learnings and best practice of how the council worked with others in the response to the pandemic and embed these within our new ways of working.
- Understand the longer-term impact of the pandemic to determine the way in which the council can help support communities in their post COVID-19 recovery.
- Use data sets and intelligence to gather insight on the scale of the impact of the pandemic on local communities and particular areas.
- BCP Council will recruit additional resource to focus on helping communities recover from the impact of COVID-19 and address particular issues across the conurbation, such as loneliness and anxiety caused by lockdowns.
- Work with local organisations and community groups to understand ways in which we can work together to aid the sector's recovery.
- Work with partners to support those negatively impacted by COVID-19 to find volunteering and work experience to help with their recovery.
- Learn from the powerful community response to understand how to continue to enable communities to unite and support each other.
- Find ways to help people connect more easily, such as sharing platforms and other technologies that connected people during recent lockdowns.
- Work with CAN to provide more support to organisations to help the sector to recover.

## Priority 4 Help people to connect with their communities

### What community means

BCP Council recognises that each community will have diverse needs and priorities. Communities can mean different things to different people and there are many diverse groups that make up a community.

**Geographical communities** are defined by a particular geographical area with physical boundaries e.g., a housing estate. These communities may have similar concerns about issues that affect their local area.

**Communities of interest** are defined by a shared interest, experience, or situation e.g. loneliness, social isolation and climate change.

**Community of identity** is defined by how people identify themselves or how they are identified by society, this can be by using demography such as young people, older people, faith groups, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer + (LGBTQ+), ethnically diverse communities.

Individuals can associate themselves with more than one community and this can relate to where they live, work and their interests. It is essential to let people define their own communities.

The council are focused on ways to unite people and facilitate ways for people to come together. It is investing additional resources to support local communities to help them develop into vibrant communities.

### Through this strategy and delivery plan we will:

- Invest in BCP Council's community development team ensuring we have dedicated workers in all of our priority neighbourhoods across Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole.
- Help communities within targeted neighbourhoods to develop and flourish by understanding community needs and interests.
- Help communities and groups to set up activities and new initiatives that help create vibrant and connected communities.
- Provide additional resources through connected community coordinators to help communities to recover from the impact of COVID-19.
- Improve awareness and create better signposting across networks, organisations and communities to make it easier for people to access the support they need.
- Work with partners to deliver initiatives that tackle digital exclusion and improve communities' digital skills and look at opportunities to increase access to the internet for vulnerable people and other priority groups.
- Work more closely with our diverse and seldom heard groups within communities.

## Priority 5 Support community-led approaches to help build resilient communities

As part of the transformation of the council we are embedding strength-based approaches within our service delivery which seeks to build on the assets that already exist within our communities. This approach challenges the traditional problem-based approach of trying to solve issues by focussing on what is not working. Instead, it focusses on "what's strong, not what's wrong" within a community, by demonstrating that local assets such as people, buildings and places are key to ensuring sustainable communities and sustainable community development. This is a commitment and an approach to developing a relationship with residents and giving them the space and support to develop their own solutions.

One of the fundamental principles is that everyone and everywhere has assets upon which resilient, healthy communities can be built. Some of these assets may be obvious such as parks and open spaces, community events, community centres and community and

voluntary sector organisations. But many assets are hidden within our communities, often within the residents that make up our communities and may need time, trust, and patience to be discovered. These assets may be skills, gifts, talents, or networks - such as a local business letting residents use their office space, a retired teacher looking to get involved in the local community, the parent who volunteers at a youth club, a local pre-school who engages with children and parents or the local café that opens in the evening for a social meet up.

As part of the transformation of the council we are expanding how we use strength-based approaches, not only in terms of how we operate as a council but also in relation to how we support our priority neighbourhoods across Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole. Investment into the Community Development function of the council is enabling us to work in all our priority neighbourhoods across Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole, working with and enabling the local community rather than using a 'top down' approach

Nearly half (44%) of consultation respondents are involved in local activities or groups that help their community and take part in a range of local activities and groups. Those aged 45-54 years and over 65 years are more likely to be involved in such activities than other age groups, whereas- 55-64-year-olds were less likely to know what local groups exist.

Whilst nearly two thirds (66%) agreed that they would like to get more involved to help others in their community, and respondents aged 35-44 were particularly interested, nearly half (44%) felt they didn't have enough support to set up their own community initiatives and groups.

### **Through this strategy and delivery plan we will:**

- Help people to become more self-reliant through finding support and solutions to help address their needs.
- Support residents to develop their own skills and capabilities to become resilient and thrive.
- Create more ways to share information about local activities and groups, learning from the ways people connected during recent lockdowns.
- Work with communities to help them to set up their own initiatives and groups to respond to need.
- As part of the transformation of the council we will look at how we embed community-led approaches across the organisation.

## Priority 6 Focus on early intervention and prevention to support people to avoid crisis

By focusing on earlier interventions, it provides opportunities to help prevent people falling into crisis, as well as focus on community resilience to help people to recover more quickly if they have been in crisis. Partnerships such as the BCP Health and Wellbeing Board and Our Dorset's Integrated Care System bring together statutory organisations, working in partnership with the voluntary and community sector, to understand problems such as health inequalities in a more holistic way. The partner organisations share goals and commitments to provide a more joined up approach to the way in which support and services are provided to individuals in crisis and recovery.

We need to learn more from those that have lived experience of the challenges we are trying to help solve. In partnership, we need to better understand the pathways that have led people into crisis and how we can help people recover or intervene early to prevent entering into crisis where possible. These stories need to be shared more broadly across networks to help improve the way in which support is provided by understanding how and when people feel they are able to access support.

### Through this strategy and delivery plan we will:

- Work in partnership with the voluntary and community sector to share information around community needs.
- Embed lived experience examples within the development work to shape council services.
- Work in partnership to look at ways in which the voluntary and community sector can provide wellbeing support alongside more formal health services.





## 6 Volunteering and social action in the BCP area



Almost every aspect of everyday life, the communities we live in, our physical environment, our sport and leisure activities, where we work and worship, our schools and hospitals benefit from volunteers. We want to make sure the vital contribution of volunteers is valued and that there are opportunities for everyone to take part in volunteering and social action across Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole.

Volunteering offers many benefits, personal, social, and economic, for the volunteers themselves, local groups, organisations and charities, the wider community and economy. Benefits include:

- helping others in the local community
- giving something back
- making a difference to the lives of others
- improving health and wellbeing – having a sense of purpose
- exploring people's interests
- sharing skills and experiences
- gaining new skills, knowledge and experience
- enhancing a CV
- becoming 'job or study ready'
- gaining confidence and self-esteem
- meeting people and making new friends
- feeling valued and part of a team.

This strategy is the commitment of BCP Council, working in partnership with CAN and others to support and encourage volunteering. We want to support local people who want to help and give the gift of their time, experience and insight, to do so safely and effectively. We want to provide rewarding experiences, and positively impact the organisation/community where they are involved in volunteering and social action. We believe that volunteering helps to make our communities more resilient, with people from different backgrounds and ages coming together for a shared purpose. It leads to community cohesion, increased social capital and communities seeing themselves as the solution.



This vision is underpinned by the following values:

**Fairness and equity:** Volunteering is open to everyone, enhancing social inclusion and good relationships across our communities.

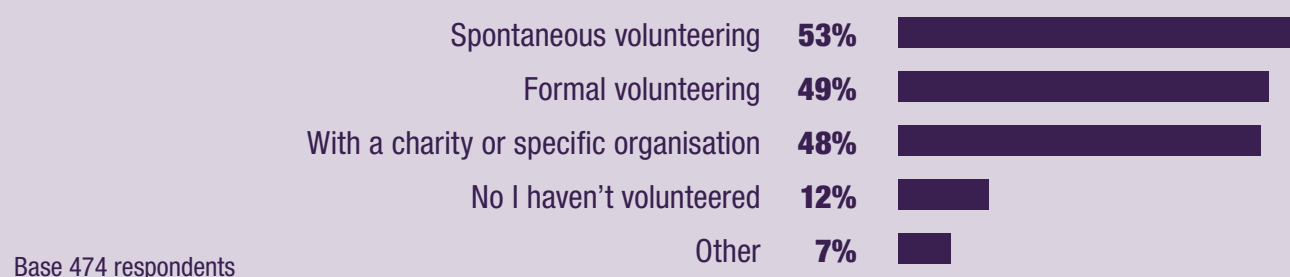
**The importance of free will/choice:** Volunteering is a matter of free choice and there should be no compulsion to take part.

**Mutual benefit:** Volunteering is a shared experience. It is rewarding and of benefit to the volunteer in building skills, confidence and extending social networks. Volunteering is of benefit to our communities in contributing to the achievement of vibrant communities.

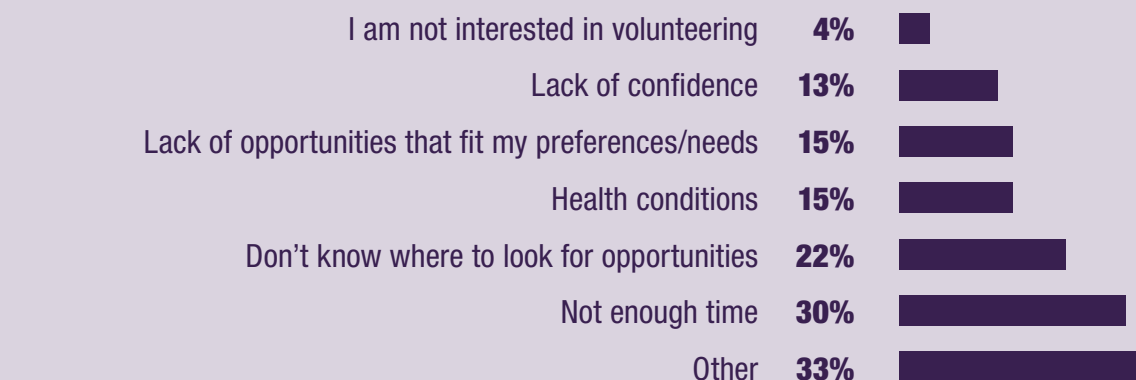
Many people across the area participate in some form of volunteering, whether it be formal volunteering for an organisation, or self-organising and neighbourliness through a community group. We have seen a great volunteer response during the pandemic, and the consultation revealed those aged 16 to 34 years were more likely to have started volunteering over the last twelve months as a result of the pandemic. Whilst 12% of respondents hadn't volunteered in the last 12 months, over half (59%) had started volunteering more than three years ago and almost all (99%) planned to continue volunteering.

The consultation highlighted that not everyone feels they are able to volunteer. Around a third of the respondents in the consultation (30%) stated that not having enough time and family/work commitments were key factors that prevented them from volunteering. Many people may lack the confidence to start volunteering or do not feel they have anything to offer.

### Public consultation: **Have you done any of the following volunteering in the last year?**



### Public consultation: **Reasons for not volunteering**



Other - responses included Covid related reasons, family or work commitments and administrative issues

In order to achieve the vision, this strategy broadly focuses on volunteering and social action across the wider community. It will look at not only council-led opportunities but volunteering and social action that takes place through the voluntary and community sector, faith communities, statutory agencies including health organisations, local businesses, and through more informal mechanisms.

Taking into consideration the views captured through the consultation as well as stakeholder engagement feedback, the following priorities have been developed to improve the way in which volunteering and social action is enabled across the area.

### **Priorities** for developing volunteering opportunities and social action where everyone can play an active role to help others

- v1** Recognising the value and promoting the benefits of volunteering.
- v2** Enhancing accessibility, choice and diversity.
- v3** Providing positive and rewarding volunteering experiences.
- v4** Bringing communities together to enable social action.
- v5** Engaging employers and business leaders to play their part.
- v6** Developing a more joined up approach to volunteering within the council.

## **Priority v1 Recognising the value and promoting the benefits of volunteering**

### **The value of volunteering**

Through this strategy we aim to raise awareness of the value of volunteering in terms of the benefits to both the individual and the wider community. Volunteering enables people to meet new friends and acquaintances, learn new skills, gain knowledge, feel a sense of purpose and provide valuable experience that can enhance career prospects and improve overall quality of life. Volunteering can help reduce stress and depression, increase your wellbeing and create a positive frame of mind. The range and breadth of volunteering opportunities is large with some roles requiring specialist training whilst others are more informal or take place in response to a specific situation or emergency.

### **Promoting opportunities**

The consultation revealed that often people don't know where to look for opportunities and there is a lack of information about what it will entail, which can raise concerns. Through this strategy we aim to better promote and communicate the volunteering opportunities available across Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole to reach as wide an audience as possible.

## Public consultation: **Where do you look for volunteering opportunities?**



Base 407 respondents

Whilst many opportunities are advertised online, respondents aged over 65 years are significantly less likely to use the internet to search for volunteering opportunities. We need to promote volunteer opportunities through a range of ways such as:

- Online through social media, local news outlets
- Community posters e.g., at libraries/shopping centres
- Informed chats/meetings to say exactly what is involved.

### Through the strategy and delivery plan we will:

- Work with CAN to support and encourage volunteering.
- Promote the volunteering hub provided by CAN for people to find out about opportunities that are available.
- Evidence the impact of volunteering on improving lives and places, including social value models.
- Improve the image of volunteering to a wider audience through inspiring stories and examples, promoting champions from different backgrounds and circumstances.
- Build on the achievements from the TWC initiative and look at ways to sustain interest in ongoing volunteering, taking into consideration the difference in crisis response versus ongoing volunteering.
- Learn from other national COVID-19 community responses to embrace innovative ways to encourage volunteering and social action.
- Maintain momentum and build capacity for sustained growth in volunteering through local voluntary and community organisations.
- Work across sectors to share good practice, increase recognition and improve the experience of volunteers.



## Priority v2 Enhancing accessibility, choice and diversity

### Accessibility and diversity

Just over half of the consultation respondents (59%) thought that council volunteering and work experience opportunities are open and accessible to all residents in our communities. We believe that volunteering should be open and accessible to everyone who wants to take part.

Public consultation:

**How can the council make it more open and accessible for everyone to want to get involved in council-led volunteering and work experience?**

#### Main themes



Number of comments

Better awareness	193
Identify needs of different groups	32
Clearer information	30
Partner with other organisation/stakeholders	30
Better/easier registration form	22
Flexible hours/opportunities	15
Interesting/well run opportunities	15
General comment	8

Base 272 comments

We will work with a range of organisations, groups and community leaders to reach out to those not already participating in volunteering and social action to better understand how they may want to get involved, including under-represented groups.

We will set up a working group to bring together council staff who are working with vocational volunteers, students on both paid and unpaid placements and internships, as well as those managing and developing apprenticeships. This group will examine good practice across the council and identify areas for improvement in terms of access, recruitment, support, funding and outcomes.

### Choice and flexibility

A third of survey respondents said one of the main reasons why they do not volunteer is that they do not have enough time, as well as family and work commitments. We need to overcome the barriers that prevent people from volunteering and create choice for people to feel confident that there is flexibility, control and understanding in how much they get involved and the amount of time they give.

### Through this strategy and delivery plan we will:

- Work with organisations and communities to identify and breakdown potential barriers to volunteering.
- Utilise insight from surveys and other feedback to improve the volunteering offer across communities.
- Develop new approaches to volunteering to make giving time easier.
- Ensure that everyone has an opportunity to volunteer through a diverse range of opportunities.
- Work with partners to improve accessibility of opportunities to enable everyone to contribute.
- Support care leavers and others to find opportunities and have sufficient support to get involved.

### Priority v3 Providing positive and rewarding volunteering experiences

Volunteers should have an enjoyable, rewarding and effective volunteering experience. They should be engaged in meaningful activity which reflects their skills, passion, life experiences and long-term goals.

Volunteers need to be recognised for the valuable contribution they make to society. We will look at ways to celebrate, acknowledge and thank individuals for their contribution, as well as inspire and encourage others to take part. We also need to ensure that volunteers are effectively supported and managed both within the Council and across the sector.

### Through this strategy and delivery plan we will:

- Work in close partnership with CAN and the local VCS to help improve the local volunteering opportunities and experiences available.
- Increase the range of rewarding and meaningful volunteering opportunities available.
- Explore ways to celebrate volunteers' efforts.
- Provide information and support to individuals and organisations with responsibility for managing and coordinating volunteers.
- CAN will develop a 'ready to volunteer' training programme for volunteers.
- Support VCS organisations to provide volunteers with appropriate levels of training and support.

## Priority v4 Bringing communities together to volunteer and enable social action

Volunteering needs to be easy and accessible. CAN have developed a volunteer hub and database to share volunteering opportunities. This platform has helped enable the volunteer response at the mass vaccination site at the Bournemouth International Centre. The vaccination programme has been one of the most successful in the country due to the professional support afforded to the programme by CAN and its volunteers.

### Through this strategy and delivery plan we will:

- Make it easier for people to sign up and access a range of volunteering opportunities.
- Support communities to come together to create self-organised volunteering to address local challenges.
- Support and develop existing volunteering groups at different stages of their development.
- Create more opportunities for joined up approaches in the way in which organisations work with and recruit volunteers.
- Review sharing platforms and other technologies to help people connect more easily to build stronger connected communities.

## Priority v5 Engaging employers and business leaders

Several businesses in the local area already commit through their corporate social responsibility agendas to support local communities, including supporting their employees to volunteer locally. We will look at more ways that we can include business within existing partnerships to share information about local social issues to enable collaborative working.

BCP Council is committed to this strategy and ensuring that more people are actively involved in their communities. BCP Council is reviewing the way in which it enables its staff to get more involved in volunteering in their communities. This may include employer supported volunteering, whereby staff can take paid time off to undertake public duties (such as school governor, magistrates etc.) as well as general volunteering, including support to local charities and organisations.

CAN have developed Business Supporter Membership to support businesses to work in partnership with their local community. Members are able to:

- access the CAN volunteering hub - promoting volunteering opportunities to employees
- access a wide range of local opportunities to contribute, effectively matching business corporate social responsibility goals to local needs

- connect with other like-minded businesses and VCS organisations while hearing about all the great work the VCS sector does
- link to charities to identify how businesses can help them through support with fundraising, volunteering, donations or grant giving
- get information, advice and guidance about VCS organisations to connect businesses with CAN and our VCS members who can provide employer supported volunteering experiences
- receive an e-network email providing regular updates celebrating, championing, and promoting the VCS sector - sharing good news stories and updates about what is happening within their community and how they could get involved.

### Through this strategy and delivery plan we will:

- Work with CAN to help create further connections for businesses to work with local communities.
- BCP Council will explore ways to help staff to get more involved in volunteering in their communities.
- Create more opportunities for skilled and vocational volunteering that will help build skillsets.
- Look at employability skills and supporting people into the workplace.
- Improve the promotion and range of work experience available across BCP Council.
- Review previous and existing initiatives within the council and consider ways we can engage with business around volunteering and corporate social responsibility agendas.
- Promote and learn from local employers' policies around Employee Supported Volunteering, which supports staff to volunteer.

## Priority v6 Developing a more joined up approach to volunteering within the council

We want to support, improve and grow volunteering opportunities across BCP Council. This strategy sets out how we plan to raise the profile of volunteering, develop further volunteering opportunities, work more closely with our partner organisations and look after our volunteers to ensure they feel valued and appreciated.

BCP Council currently offers a range of volunteering opportunities such as volunteers for Green Spaces, Culture Volunteers, Arts by the Sea festival, Family Hubs, community transport and care leaver mentors. Only 29% of consultation respondents said they are aware of volunteering opportunities at the council and even fewer (17%) were aware of the work experience opportunities. Just under a quarter (24%) of respondents have volunteered or carried out unpaid work experience with the council. Respondents were asked what would encourage them to volunteer with the council.

Of the 220 comments, the most prevalent themes were:

- More information needed on volunteering opportunities.
- Make it easier to find opportunities.

Through this strategy we will improve the way in which we raise awareness of the volunteering opportunities that are available through the council and seek to ensure that there are a diverse range of meaningful volunteering opportunities that are available and accessible.

The strategy will bring together a more corporate wide approach to volunteering and work experience opportunities within BCP Council. This will include establishing a working group of officers to enable a more joined up approach to volunteering, sharing information and resources so that people have a better experience of volunteering with the council.

### Through the strategy and delivery plan we will:

- Review previous work to date that has been undertaken across the three council's regarding volunteering and agree on a BCP Council-wide approach.
- Create synergies across departments such as toolkits and templates where appropriate and beneficial, and in balance with individual service unit delivery requirements.
- Look at how we can create common processes and practices where possible, such as recruiting volunteers so that it is easier for people to sign up to volunteer with different council departments.
- Evaluate and consider responses to the public consultation to better understand people's experiences of volunteering and work placements with the council and look at what works well and doesn't.
- Further develop volunteering and work experience opportunities within the council to be inclusive for all communities and support our most vulnerable to get involved.
- Create a communication plan to better publicise and promote volunteering and work opportunities that exist at the council.



## Sustainability impact

The strategy is focused on local partnership working and connecting communities across the area and at a local level. By creating strong networks at a local level, it provides the opportunity for more local provision and support to organisations in the BCP area. This in turn helps to reduce the carbon footprint in our area.

Whilst an increase in volunteering could lead to more local journeys, the strategy will encourage people to participate in volunteering and social action within their local neighbourhoods. We will continue to encourage this localised volunteering or, where travel is necessary, the use of public transport in order to reduce carbon emissions in recognition of our declaration of the climate and ecological emergency.

Active communities will help address the causes/effects of climate change by volunteering to improve the natural environment and spread the message that individual actions will assist in global improvements.

## Delivery of the strategy

This strategy includes a delivery plan which provides further detail about how we aim to deliver against our priorities and the timescales for achieving this over the three year period. It incorporates the broad range of work that is being planned by others as well as how we can work together on common goals and activities through partnerships and collaborative working. Community Action Network is a key delivery partner and are grant funded by the Council to provide advice and support to the voluntary and community sector, as well as promoting and sharing volunteering opportunities. The delivery plans will be reviewed on an annual basis in order to respond to local need.

The strategy will be overseen by the Vibrant Communities Board, reporting to the BCP Health and Wellbeing Board and linking strategies together that support the overall vision for vibrant communities.

We will know if the priorities are working by measuring success against what is a vibrant connected community as outlined in the vision in section 2. We will use a range of data sources, including key performance indicators, stakeholder engagement, resident surveys, anecdotal evidence and feedback that identifies how this work and activity is making a difference to communities and people across BCP. We will define the baseline data at the start of the strategy and track progress annually using a set of key performance indicators as detailed below. In addition, there will be individual measures against specific actions with the detailed delivery plans.

## Key performance indicators for measuring success

1. A range of active community and voluntary sector organisations and community groups exist and are able to provide support to meet community needs.
2. VCS organisations and groups feel more stable, stronger and sustainable.
3. There are strong partnerships and networks that work closely together to support community needs.
4. Partnerships include a broader range of representatives from across organisations, groups and individuals.
5. There are positive examples of codesign and coproduction between the council, community and voluntary sector and residents.
6. Residents feel they belong to their local area.
7. Residents are helping others through volunteering and social action.
8. Residents do not feel socially isolated.



**We hope you find the Voluntary and Community Sector and Volunteering Strategy useful, interesting and informative and would welcome any questions or comments that you may have.**

We would also be interested to hear about your experience of services or what you would like to see improved. To let us know e-mail **[communities@bcpcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:communities@bcpcouncil.gov.uk)**

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