



# Co-operative Councils

## Innovation Network

## COMMUNITY

### North Hertfordshire District Council

## **The Community Support Fund: ensuring that community groups were able to continue essential services to residents throughout the pandemic**

North Herts is a district with a large older population as well as a number of deprived areas. The pandemic therefore produced a significant challenge around issues like loneliness, and the ability of many to afford basic needs. The Council felt equipped to address these issues by the strong relationships its Community Engagement colleagues had already built with many community groups including food provision services, as well the pot of funding designated for major incidents.

The Council therefore developed a Community Support Fund for groups put under increased pressure by the pandemic, and who were providing support in one of three key areas: food and essentials; mental health support; domestic abuse support. Two funding options were available: a one-off grant open to application from any community group; and funding agreements – on approach from North Herts District Council (NHDC) – to known providers who offer wide provision across the district, including rural areas.

The ultimate aim was to ensure the survival of community groups who provide essential services for residents, in order to avoid the wider harm that could occur in communities if such groups were unable to survive the pandemic. The project therefore exemplified values and principles of social responsibility, solidarity, and concern for community and its sustainable development, all of which are integral co-operative values.

Implementation The Community Support Fund went live in May 2020 and granted financial help to a number of community groups which have provided services for the elderly and the young, families and individuals, and for towns and villages alike.

As we moved into the winter we recognised that there would be different challenges for residents including the issue of fuel poverty. We therefore amended the policy

and criteria to reflect that this was covered under 'Food and essentials'. We also incorporated information about period poverty into the policy, recognising it as a key issue, and made explicit that this too was covered under the criteria.

The project represents values of community leadership as well as the principle of social partnership – strengthening cooperation between communities and Councils through finding new models for meeting priority needs.

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