

# **Exeter COVID-19 Community Action Fund Report**

## **Introduction**

The Exeter COVID-19 Community Action Fund (CAF) was set up at the outset of the COVID pandemic in March 2020 to help community groups and organisations as they stepped up to help those people most affected by the pandemic. The fund is supported by Exeter City Council and a generous £100,000 contribution from Exeter Chiefs Foundation.

The initial fund offered up to £3,000 to community organisations who were facing a loss of income. Business grant support became available in May 2020 at which point the £3,000 grant was suspended.

The Fund remained open to support groups and organisations with a one-off grant of up to £1,000 to support projects for community led activities that would:

- meet urgent needs within the community
- cover transport costs for getting vital supplies to people isolated at home
- help people to stay connected and informed
- help people maintain and support mental health and wellbeing.

This report provides preliminary analysis gathered from the 'impact evaluations' completed so far by grant recipients of the COVID-19 Community Action Fund. It summarises key themes arising from the evaluations, to help draw conclusions on how effective the Covid 19 Community Action Fund has been in meeting community needs.

## **Applications**

162 applications were received, of which 115 were for £1,000 or less.

### **£1,000 Grant:**

- 115 application received
- 75 awarded (65.22%)
- 40 declined (34.78%)

### **£3,000 Grant:**

- 47 applications received
- 28 awarded (59.57%)
- 19 declined (40.43%)

### **Overall:**

- 162 applications received
- 103 awarded (63.58%)
- 59 declined (36.42%)
- Total Committed: £128,139.69

129 organisations applied for Community Action Fund support, these are listed in Appendix 1. 19 organisations delivered more than one project, and submitted separate applications for each project. This accounts for the reported 162

applications. Of the 129 organisations that applied for CAF support 13 (10.08%) were equality groups which work with communities that are particularly disadvantaged like women, Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME), the elderly, those with mental health challenges and disabilities.

The Community Action Fund awarded grants to a number of grassroots community groups to enable them to support their communities through the pandemic including providing free cooked meals, food parcels, online activities, and courses to support individuals and families to cope with isolation during the lockdowns.

Community Centres were supported by our £3,000 Grant. Such centres were facing a loss of income before business grant support became available to them in May 2020. Community Centres also received funds to facilitate reopening after the first lockdown.

Since the start of the pandemic one of the most pressing needs highlighted by community groups was access to free food. A number of community-led projects were started and supported by the Community Action Fund to provide cooked meals and food parcels alongside existing food providers such as the Food Bank and FareShare. With an increasing need for this kind of support, the Exeter Community Food Network was established to provide a platform for long term Community Food providers to share information and work together to ensure that there is a strategic approach to tackling food poverty in the city. More information is available here: <https://www.exeterconnect.org/networks/>

Exeter Connect, commissioned by Exeter City Council through the Exeter Grants Programme, were instrumental in supporting a number of community groups to apply for the CAF grant. Exeter Connect offered assistance with writing applications and holding grants for groups which didn't have their own bank accounts. <https://www.exeterconnect.org/>

### **Case Studies**

#### **The Beacon Centre – Isca Community Enterprises**

- Grant awarded: £1,000
- Ward-focused project in Mincinglake & Whipton

The £1,000 CAF grant helped the Beacon Centre to provide essential goods and services to those who are vulnerable and self-isolating. The service included food shopping, picking up medicine from local pharmacies and making 'welfare' calls to individuals to check they were okay. The Beacon Centre directly supported 135 people and delivered wellbeing leaflets to 5,000 homes. They also developed close relationships with local schools during their project.

#### **Friends of Heavitree Health Centre**

- Grant awarded: £1,000
- Ward-focused project in Heavitree

Friends of Heavitree Health Centre supported patients with transport to and from booked appointments, as well as delivering 220 prescriptions to patients at home during the lockdown. The £1,000 grant from Exeter City Council helped avoid the risks of queuing that may have been incurred by vulnerable people visiting the pharmacy.

### Freemoovement

- Grant awarded: £1,000
- Ward-focused project in St Thomas

Freemoovement delivered in excess of 30 food parcels per week from the St Thomas Community Larder, particularly for those who did not qualify for the Government food parcels and additionally did not meet the criteria for the food bank. The £1,000 grant from Exeter City Council also helped Freemoovement deliver over 500 meals to the homeless for people in desperate need of hot food.

### Ludwell Valley Early Childhood Centre

- Grant awarded: £1,000
- Ward-focused project in Priory

Ludwell Valley Early Childhood Centre is a charity-based preschool in Wonford which remained open throughout the pandemic to support the wellbeing of children. The £1,000 grant from Exeter City Council enabled them to continue keeping the preschool open, ensuring pre-school children continued to get structured educational activities within a safe and well-resourced environment.

### Exeter Mosque & Cultural Centre

- Grant awarded: £3,000
- City-wide project

Exeter Mosque provided food for those most in need, including people from different faiths, Syrian refugees and members of the Afghan community. The £3,000 grant from Exeter City Council helped Exeter Mosque feed over 400 people, and helped in developing communal bonds and sense of belonging and attachment.

### Inclusive Exeter CIC

- Grant awarded: £976.58
- City-wide project

Inclusive Exeter CIC delivered frozen ready meals, food parcels, children's books and information leaflets to those going through a tough time. The £976.58 grant from Exeter City Council helped Inclusive Exeter CIC benefit 998 people right across the City, including responding to requests from people, delivering to residential homes, a homeless shelter and some community groups with vulnerable members.

### CEDA

- Grant awarded: £1,000
- City-wide project

CEDA delivered over 40 educational sessions in a range of topics including local history, sign language, cookery and music. The £1,000 grant from Exeter City Council helped CEDA allow essential opportunity to communicate, seek support, and improve skills and knowledge.

### Exeter City Community Trust

- Grant awarded: £1,000
- City-wide project

Exeter City Community Trust used a number of their vehicles to provide 53 hardship packages and deliver over 50 medical prescriptions. The £1,000 grant from Exeter City Council helped Exeter City Community Trust support over 100 households with essential food supply from shops.

### Co-Lab Exeter Resilient Women

- Grant awarded: £1,000
- City-wide project

Co-Lab Exeter Resilient Women was awarded £1,000 for their Keeping the Connection project to buy 10 tablets to enable some vulnerable people who didn't have any IT access to connect with their online programs including self-care, peer mentoring, transition to volunteering and employment, creative writing and arts and crafts.

### Exeter Network Church

- Grant awarded: £1,000
- City-wide project

Exeter Network Church was supported by a £1,000 CAF grant for their Exeter Christians Against Poverty debt advice centre, which helps anyone in Exeter and the surrounding area who is struggling with unmanageable debt. Their award-winning service has a high level of support and is totally free to the client. They gather financial information, set budgets, deal with creditors and support clients until they become debt free, either via a debt management plan or an insolvency option.

### Citizens Advice Exeter

- Grant awarded: £1,000
- City-wide project

Citizens Advice Exeter was supported by a £1,000 CAF grant in making their operation remote at the start of the pandemic. They used the funds to improve their IT infrastructure so that they could continue providing services from home by telephone and webchat. They were able to provide over 800 hours of time supporting people from home.

### Exeter Community Energy

- Grant awarded: £1,000
- City wide project

Exeter Community Energy was supported by a £1,000 CAF grant, which enabled them to provide support to 700 households with issues around energy billing and tariff switching, emergency topping up of meters, broken boilers, and other energy and water related issues. This was done remotely via phone calls and emails.

## **Analysis of Submitted Impact**

From the impact evaluations completed by applicants, various points have emerged both on what went well and what applicants would do differently next time.

### **What Went Well and Key Achievements**

1. Online activities were a good substitute for the in-person equivalents: Some applicants have stated that by putting on adapted activities online, this helped engage with communities. The general theme is that online activities were well-received by communities.
2. The speed at which some services were 'redesigned' to be remote: Some applicants stated that they redesigned their operations to be remote in a speedy manner. Exeter Community Energy is a good example, in terms of 1:1 phone calls to residents to assist them with energy billing and tariff switching, topping up meters and boiler breakdowns. They supported 700 households. This demonstrates that key community organisations can indeed be responsive to the needs of beneficiaries and adapt well.
3. Normal services continuing to operate (remotely) to ensure no interruption: Key 'service' organisations were able to continue their usual services in an adapted way; this helped ensure there was no major disruption or pause in services. Citizens Advice is an example. It is clear that the services these organisations provided are essential to some beneficiaries and encouraging to hear that pandemic disruption was minimised.
4. Rapid, responsive distribution/acquisition of essential resources: Many projects were able to acquire resources they needed rapidly, like IT equipment for remote working. Other projects expressed that distribution of resources to beneficiaries happened very quickly; for example, clothing, prescriptions and food. Exeter City Community Trust provided 53 hardship packages, delivered over 50 medical prescriptions and supported over 100 households with essential food supply shops over the first lockdown period.
5. Lifting the burden from vulnerable people and over-stretched carers: Projects that focused on prescription delivery and grocery shopping indicated doing this for and on behalf of vulnerable people as essential support. Friends of Heavitree Health Centre is one example.
6. Broader outreach: Projects have said that they reached more of the community than they normally would. This is encouraging as it shows that the CAF enabled projects to reach more people. Examples include Exeter Mosque & Cultural Centre and Freemoovement.
7. Donations and/or further funding for continuity of activities: Some projects reported that their activities were so well-received that it led to donations and/or further funding for continuation. This supports the findings that projects are valued by communities.
8. Reaching the 'ineligible': Freemoovement mentioned that many of the people they reached "did not qualify for the Government food parcels and felt that they did not meet the criteria for the food bank". This demonstrates that some vulnerable people have received support who may otherwise have been "left behind".
9. Cross-organisational collaboration/partnership: Some projects explained they collaborated with others for their activities for example the Beacon Centre working with local schools to reach more people.

### What may be done better or improved (Constructive Points)

1. “Nothing”: Some projects reported that they would not do anything differently, citing that their project was delivered as planned with no major challenges.
2. Reaching/engaging more people: Some projects indicated that they would have liked to reach more people, including a broader range of beneficiaries. Exeter Mosque is one example, who have identified they would explore sponsored social media posts and networking to reach more people. One project reported that some registered for online sessions but didn’t attend, and that they would do reminder phone calls in future. Another project reported they would implement more targeting to ensure the service was reaching the more vulnerable in their community.
3. Relevant Skills: This is relevant for projects involving IT and food. Projects which focused on adapting their services for remote operation mentioned that limited/variable IT skills of some people was a challenge. For food projects, some reported it was challenging to find people that are appropriately skilled and qualified for preparing food.
4. Better emergency planning procedures: Some projects have pointed out that they would consider having better emergency planning procedures. This is encouraging as it shows that organisations are thinking about how they could respond to a future crisis, as emergencies cannot be ruled out.
5. Social distancing: A small number of projects indicated that social distancing measures meant their physical capacity to operate projects has been limited compared to a non-pandemic situation.
6. More sustainable funding: One project identified looking for more sustainable funding as what they would do differently.
7. Surplus supplies: A small number of food projects reported that they had surplus supplies. However, these were donated to the food bank which encouraged joined up working.

### Conclusion

From the impact evaluations completed so far, it is clear that projects funded by the CAF had extensively positive benefits.

The four key themes of what projects may do differently:

1. Reaching/engaging more people
2. Developing/Improving Skills
3. Emergency planning
4. Social distancing

*NB: This is a short preliminary analysis of Impact Evaluations completed to date, drawing on key themes grant recipients have reported back on.*

**Appendix 1: List of Applicant Organisations (Ordered Alphabetically)**

1. 1st Exeter Boys Brigade
2. AbilityNet
3. Age UK Exeter
4. Alphington Community Association
5. Alright Mate? CIC
6. AngELs Early years
7. Ann Spence
8. Armed Forces Community Support Hub
9. Art Pack Project
10. Baby Bank Network Exeter
11. BCHA
12. Beacon Centre - ISCA Community Enterprises
13. bibic
14. bthechange CIC
15. By Design Theatre
16. CEDA
17. Citizens Advice Exeter
18. CLIC Sargent
19. CoLab Exeter
20. CoLab Exeter - Resilient Women
21. Connections Group
22. Countess Wear Village Hall
23. Cruse Bereavement Care - Devon
24. DanSci Performance Stars
25. Devon Development Education
26. Devon History Society
27. Devon Link Up
28. Devon Rape Crisis and Sexual Abuse Services
29. Double Elephant Print Workshop
30. Dreadnought South West
31. Eat Your Greens
32. Elite Training South West Ltd
33. ESSENCE of Exeter CIC
34. Estuary League of Friends
35. Exeter Amateur Boxing & Physical Culture Club
36. Exeter Chamber
37. Exeter City Community Trust
38. Exeter Communities Together
39. Exeter Community Centre Trust
40. Exeter Community Energy
41. Exeter Community Initiatives
42. Exeter Dementia Action Alliance
43. Exeter Dispensary and Aid in Sickness Fund
44. Exeter Girlguiding
45. Exeter Leukaemia Fund (ELF)
46. Exeter Lipreaders
47. Exeter Mosque and Cultural Centre
48. Exeter Network Church
49. Exeter Phoenix
50. Exeter Scrapstore
51. Exeter Sew Volunteers
52. Exeter St James Forum
53. Exeter Tae Kwon Do
54. Exwick Community Church
55. FORCE Cancer Charity
56. Freemoovement UK CIC
57. Friends of Heavitree Health Centre
58. Friends of Ide Lane Surgery
59. Friends of St Thomas Health Centre
60. Headway Devon
61. Hikmat Devon CIC
62. Hill Barton Vale Little Free Library
63. Hill Barton Vale Residents Association
64. Home-Start Exeter, East and Mid Devon
65. Hospiscare
66. Inclusive Exeter CIC
67. Inspire Thinking Ltd
68. Interwoven Productions CIC
69. It's All About You Wellbeing and Max Cohen Wellbeing Services
70. Jay's AIM - Helping Young Hearts
71. Julian House - Assertive Homeless Outreach Team
72. Life Education Wessex
73. Lifeworks Charity Ltd
74. Living Options Devon
75. Ludwell Valley Early Childhood Centre
76. Maketank
77. Michelle Sank
78. More Positive Me CIC
79. Music in Devon Initiative
80. Newtown Community Association
81. Nutriri
82. OrganicARTS (The Makers Group)
83. PaddleBoat Theatre CIC
84. Park Life Heavitree
85. Pennsylvania Good Neighbour Group
86. Pennsylvania International Friendship Group
87. Pete's Dragons

- 88. Phoenix Counselling services trading as Palace Gate Counselling Service
- 89. Picking up the Threads
- 90. Pinhoe Community Centre- America Hall & Sunnylands Room
- 91. Pinhoe Community Hub
- 92. Pinhoe Community Support Group
- 93. Pinhoe Pantomime Society
- 94. Polsoe Community Association
- 95. Positive Light Projects
- 96. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder Association
- 97. Samaritans of Exeter, Mid and East Devon
- 98. Sanctuary Supported Living
- 99. SeeAbility
- 100. Shilhay Housing Action Group
- 101. Sound Gallery CIC
- 102. South West Women in Business CIC
- 103. St Katherine's Priory
- 104. St Petrock's (Exeter) Ltd
- 105. St Sidwell's Centre
- 106. St Thomas Community Association
- 107. St Thomas Food Larder
- 108. Steph Hartland Productions
- 109. Stoke Hill Community Association
- 110. Stoke Hill Hot Food Project
- 111. Stop Abuse for Everyone (SAFE)
- 112. Sylvania Community Facilities Association
- 113. The Audience Club
- 114. The Baby Room
- 115. The Devon Carousel Project
- 116. The Harrington's Residence Community Association
- 117. The Nest Southwest CIC
- 118. The Pelican Project Exeter CIC
- 119. The Salvation Army
- 120. Topsham Community Association
- 121. Vranck House School
- 122. Well Image CIC
- 123. Whimble Cricket Club
- 124. Whipton Community Association
- 125. Whizz Kids Toys Community Interest Company
- 126. Wonford Community and Learning Centre
- 127. Wonford Planters
- 128. Wood for Good
- 129. YMCA Exeter Community Projects

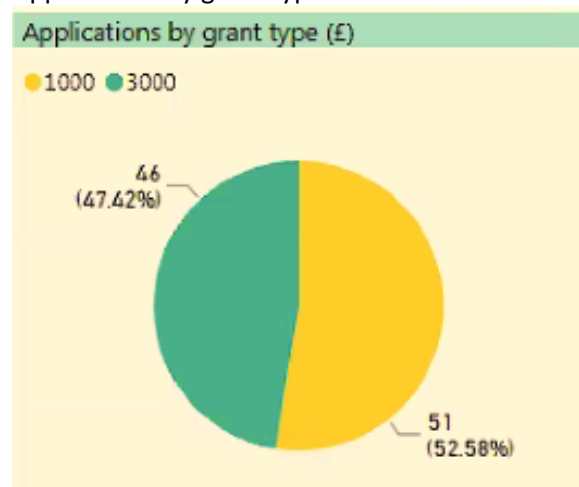
**Appendix 2**

Applications by grant area covered



Of a sample of 97 applications were received, the majority were for city-wide projects, while some were in respect of ward specific projects.

Applications by grant type



Of a sample of 97 applications received, the majority were for £1,000 or less. Just under a half were for £3,000 or less.