

1. Background and Methodology

The coronavirus pandemic has emphasised the importance of the work of local councils and community groups and organisations. The work of local leaders and volunteers has been recognised. Communities across Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin responded quickly to establish pandemic responses and continue to ensure community members most in need of support receive information and assistance.

Cooperation between community groups and town and parish councils has always been important, but the results local partnerships achieve have been recognised more than ever during the coronavirus pandemic. Understanding this joint working is important as we work together to overcome future challenges and recover from the impacts of the pandemic.

Shropshire Association of Local Councils (SALC) worked with Shropshire Council's Feedback and Insight team to prepare some key questions for local research. Two separate surveys were prepared, one designed for town and parish councils and one to gather feedback from community groups. The aim was to use both surveys to learn more about:

- How local communities have responded to the coronavirus pandemic
- Any concerns or issues currently being faced or identified community concerns for the future
- Organisational support needs
- How local partnerships are benefiting local people
- Examples of good practice
- Ideas, suggestions and opportunities for the future

Supporting the research were the organisations which represent the voluntary and community sector in both Shropshire and Telford, the Shropshire Voluntary and Community Sector Assembly (VCSA) and the Telford Chief Officers Group (Telford COG)

The surveys were carried out between the 15th March and 16th April 2021 via the Shropshire Council website and were promoted widely within Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin to encourage participation. Opportunities to feedback were also available by post and email should anyone find themselves unable to access the online survey.

2. Survey respondents

The survey resulted in 67 responses. Of these 39 were responding to the survey designed for town and parish councils (SALC members survey) and 28 were responding to the community survey.

Question - How are you responding to this survey?

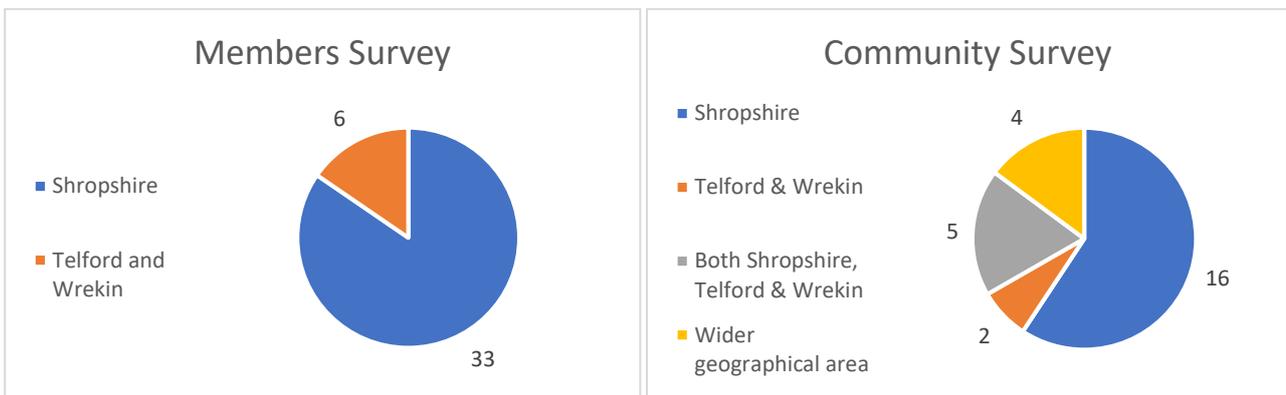
Respondents were asked in which capacity they were responding to the survey. Details are below for both surveys.

Member responses	Number
Town council	9
Parish council	21
Parish meeting	4
Other	5
Total responses	39

Community responses	Number
As a formal/registered voluntary sector organisation	13
As an informal community group	5
As a community interest company	2
As a village hall committee or other community owned building	2
As a community owned shop, pub or other community asset	2
Other (please specify)	4
Total responses	28

Question - Which local authority do you work within or cover?

The survey was promoted across both local authority areas. Respondents were asked which local authority area they worked within. The graphs below show the results.

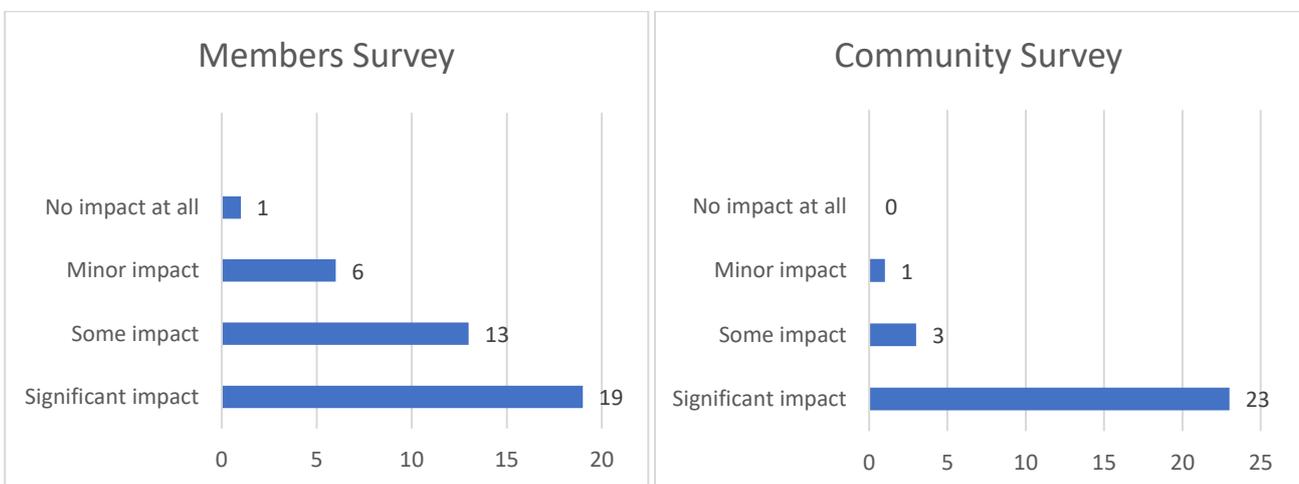


There was a greater response from organisations that work within the Shropshire area for both surveys.

3. Impact of the pandemic

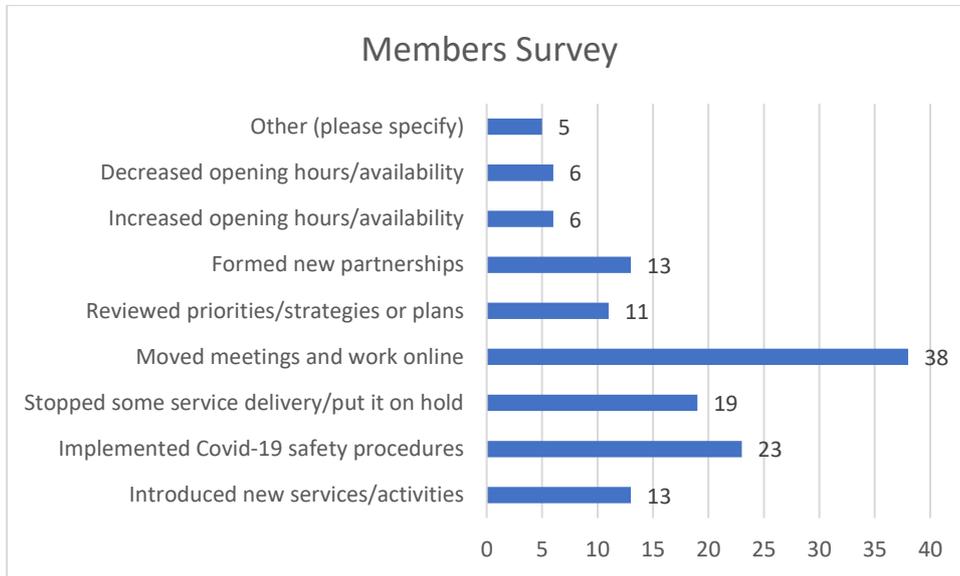
Question - How would you describe the overall impact of the coronavirus pandemic?

When asked about the impact of the coronavirus pandemic most responses identified some impact or significant impact on the work they do (26 of 27 respondents from the community survey and 32 of 39 from the members survey). Only 1 organisation said that there was no impact at all and 7 organisations said that there was minor impact from the pandemic.

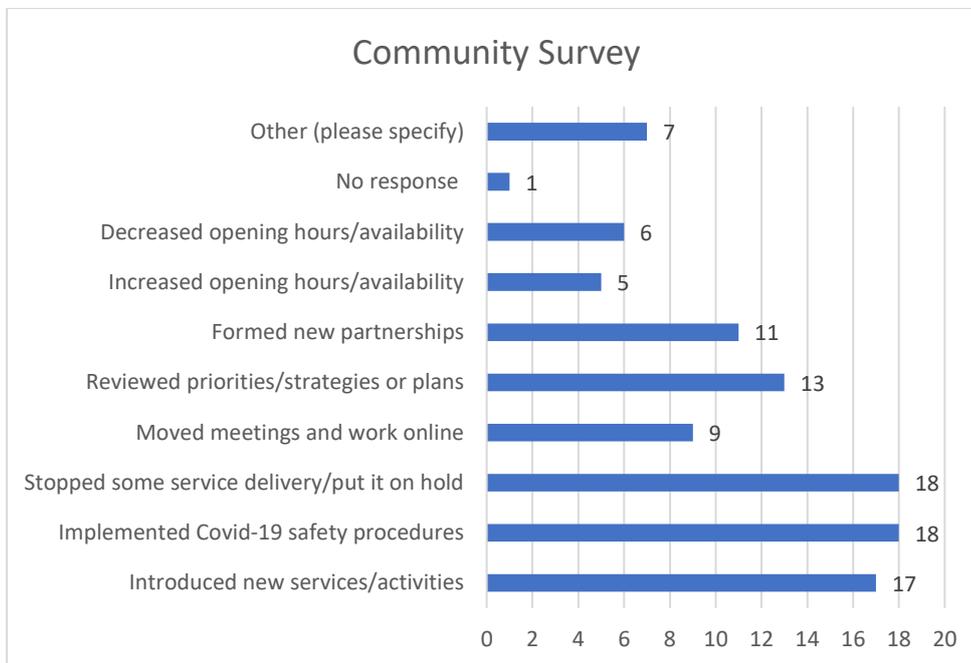


Question - What changes have you seen to the way you deliver your work?

Each of the respondents were asked to identify the changes to the way they work. The most significant change for members was the need to move meetings and work online (38 of the 39 respondents or 97%). When asked to specify the 'Other' changes members noted increased communication, changes in opening hours, reduced ability to progress planned projects and stopping some activities due to Covid rules.



The three most prevalent changes to community responses were to stop some service delivery/put it on hold (18 of 27 responses) Implement Covid-19 safety procedures (18 of 27 responses) and introduce new services/activities (17 of 18 responses)

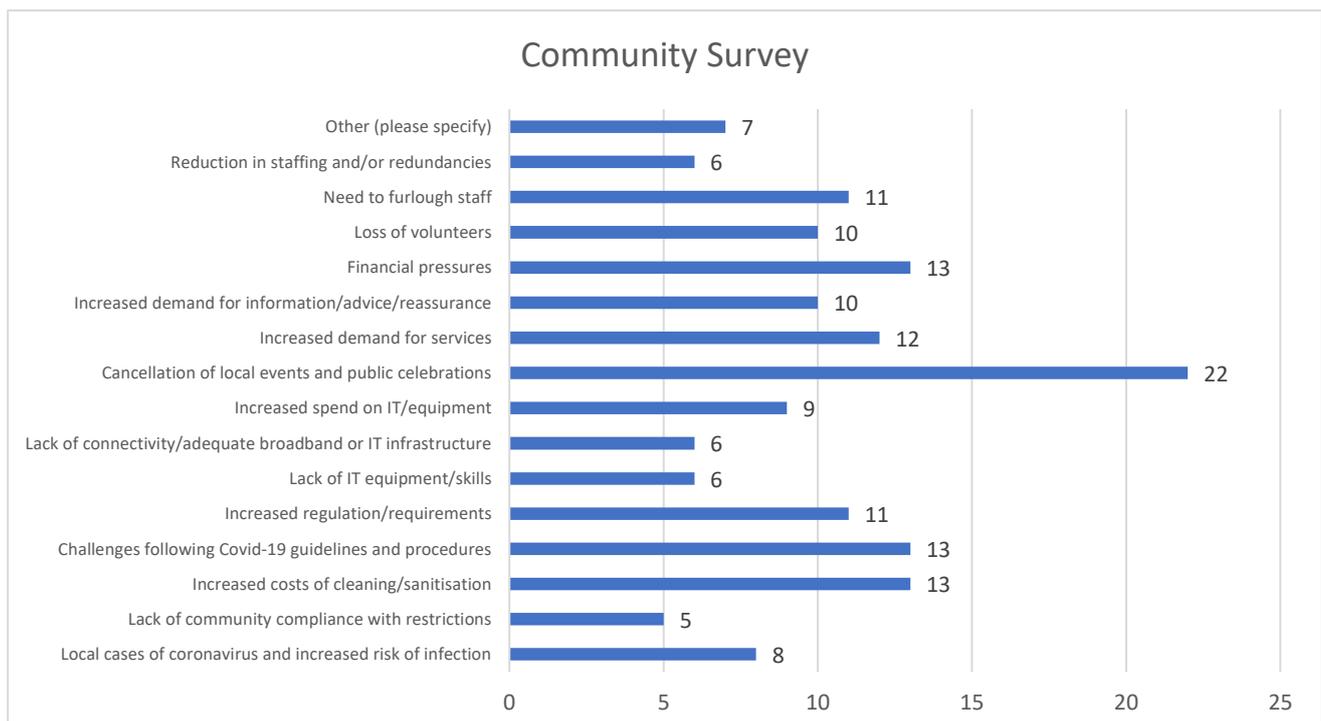
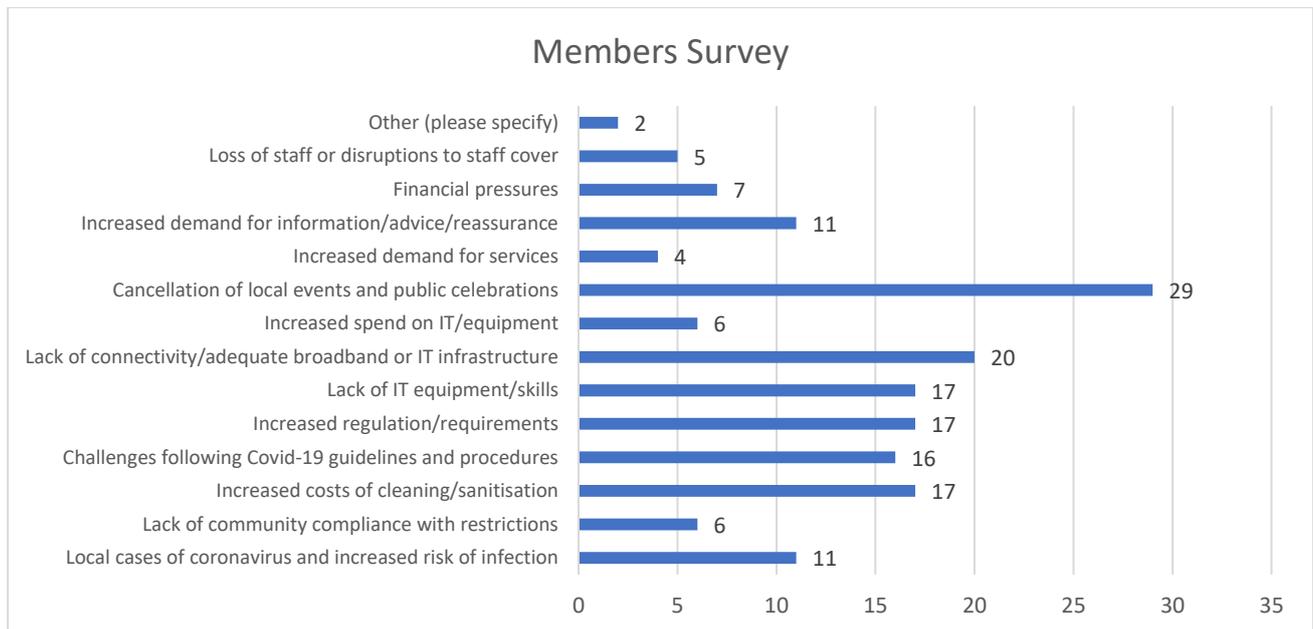


When asked to specify the 'Other' changes responses from the community survey included face to face services being replaced by remote contact and broadening the number of beneficiaries for services delivered.

4. Impact of the Pandemic on Communities

Question - Which challenges have you faced within your community?

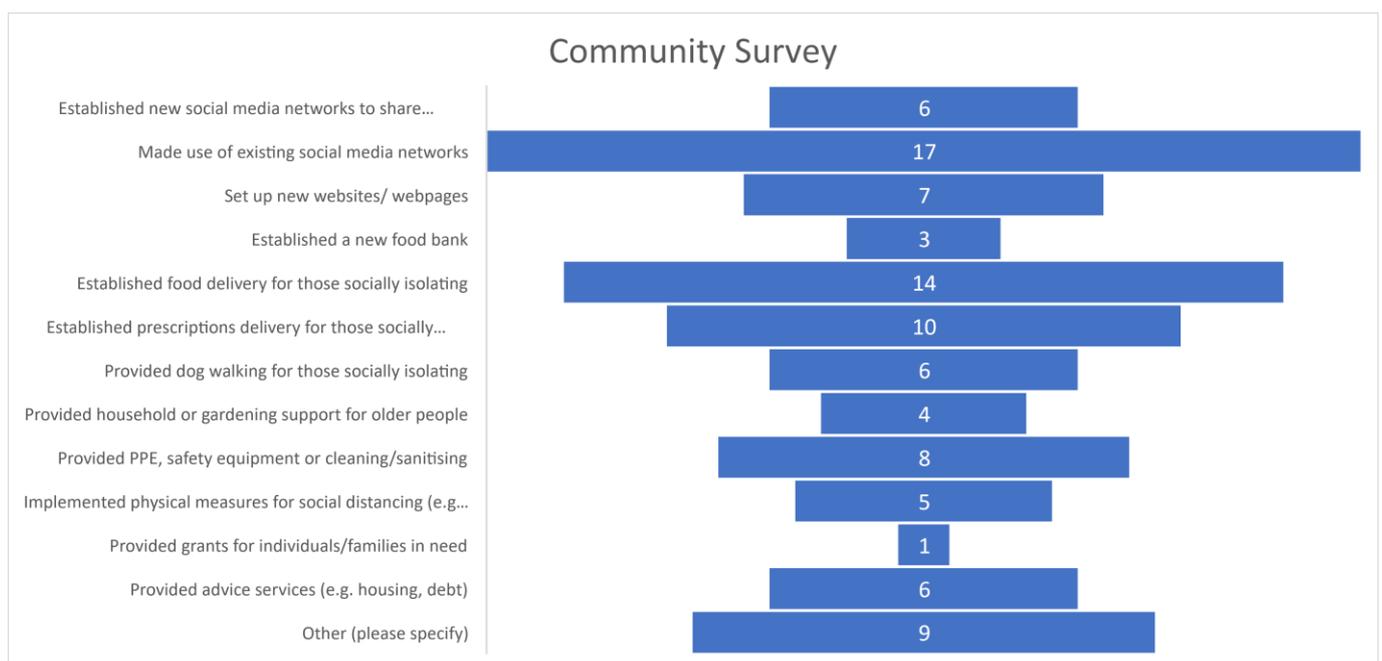
The survey asked each organisation to identify the challenges they had faced. There were 37 member responses and 26 community responses. Each organisation was able to choose as many answers that applied. The cancellation of local events and public celebrations were the most common impact for both surveys; 29 of the 37 (78%) member responses and 22 of the 26 (85%) community groups. The results show that the impact of the pandemic was wide ranging and most survey respondents experienced multiple impacts. Both groups experienced challenges responding to and implementing new Covid-19 guidance, policies and procedures. Both were impacted by the need to cancel events. SALC members were more impacted by the need to implement IT solutions compared to community groups and organisations, whereas community groups/organisations were more likely to see increased demand for services/support.



Question - How did you respond to the coronavirus pandemic to support individuals or families?

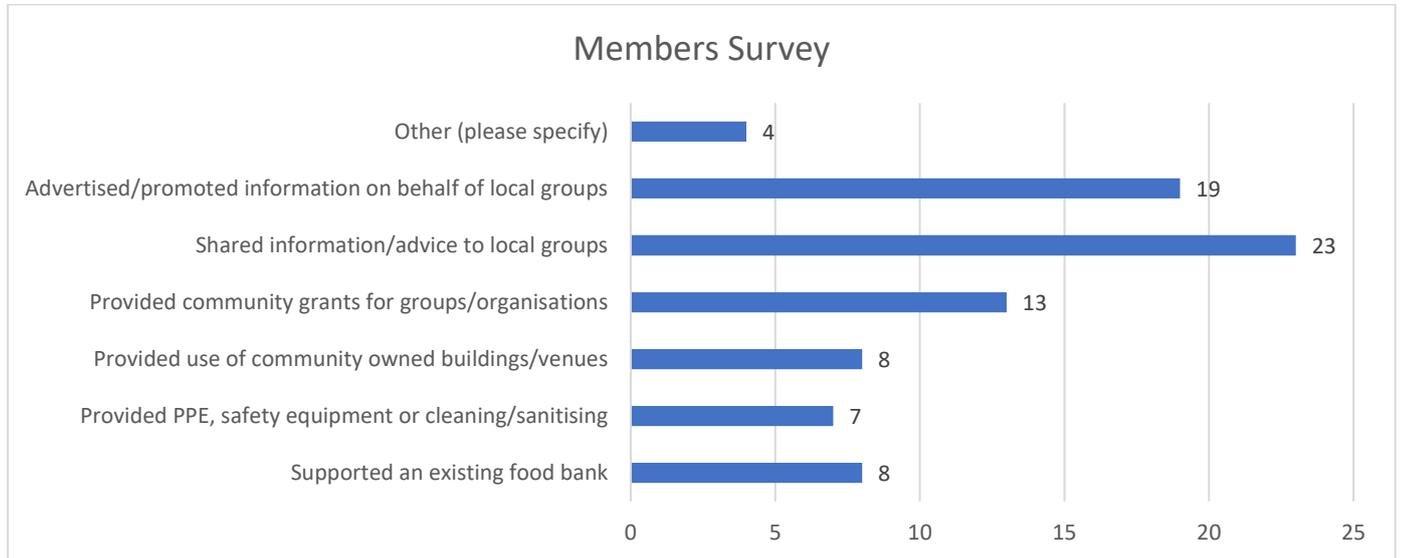
The survey asked each organisation to identify how they supported individuals or families during the pandemic. There were 35 member responses and 26 community responses to this question. Each organisation was able to choose as many answers that applied.

Both the members survey and community survey identified making use of existing social media networks as the most common way they were able to respond to the pandemic. This was followed by activities supporting people who were socially isolating by providing food delivery and/or prescription delivery. Despite the different nature of the two sample groups the results were very similar overall. The feedback highlights that emphasis was on meeting the needs of people who needed support while socially isolating at home, and on sharing information to provide reassurance within communities.

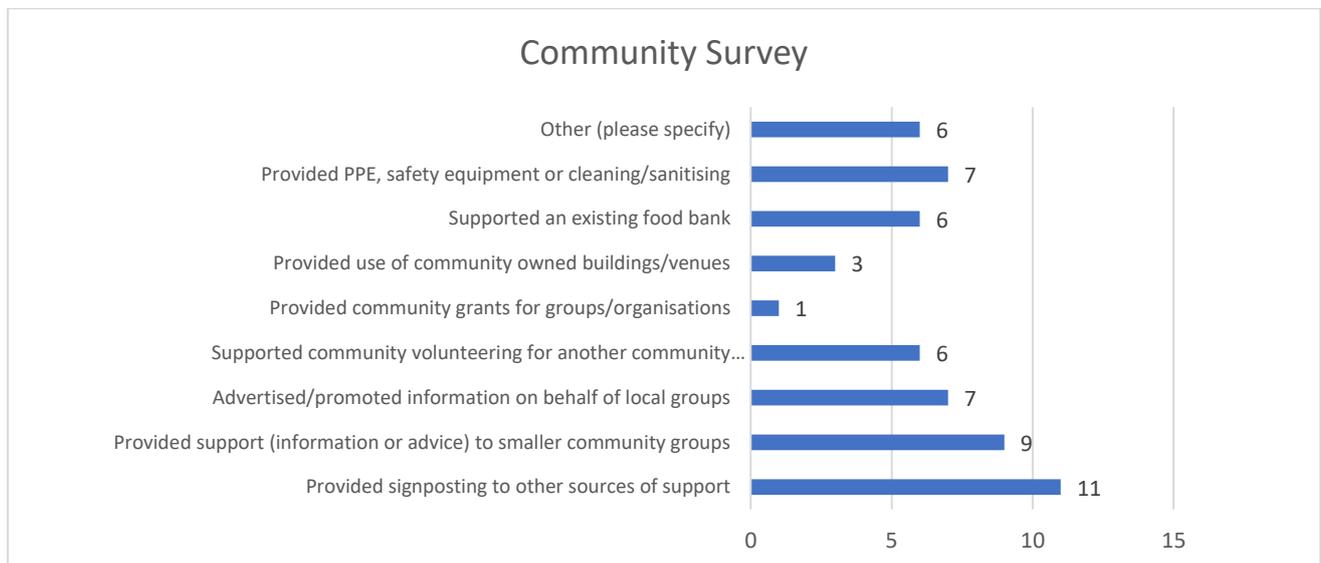


Question - Did you respond to the coronavirus pandemic to support other community groups?

There were 35 responses to the members survey and 19 to the community survey to this question. Each respondent was asked to identify the ways that they supported other community groups.



The responses to the members survey indicate that they took a lead role in information sharing within their communities with 66% (23) of respondents sharing information and/or giving advice to local groups and 54% (19) advertising or promoting information on behalf of local groups.



The community survey also indicates the lead role community organisations provided in sharing information and providing signposting to other sources of support.

The results show how interconnected town and parish councils and community groups and organisations are and the importance of local networks and partnerships. In particular, the support town and parish councils and larger community organisations provide for smaller, less formal community groups is vitally important. Types of support and examples mentioned under ‘other’ included support with grant applications, support building networks and online/IT support, the examples included access to expertise and emergency support such as foodbanks, Food Poverty Alliance, breakfast clubs and establishment of new volunteer networks.

Question - Examples of additional support provided to local groups and organisations

The surveys asked for examples of the support made available to local groups and organisations during the pandemic. There were a wide range of examples of support and these included both well-being and practical support for residents. The main themes, and several examples, are detailed below for both surveys.

Key themes from the Members Survey	Number of comments
Financial support/grants	2
Advice and Information	2
Practical help for self-isolating (food, prescriptions, etc)	3
Virtual contact/addressing loneliness and isolation	1
Supported/increased volunteering	5

Examples from the Members Survey

- *Helped with volunteers for Good Neighbours group, the pubs and Cafes provided takeaways, people shopped and collected food, new sources of local food came into town.*
- *Delivering shopping to those that are housebound or shielding. Checking in on the more elderly residents.*
- *The Parish Council responded to a grant request from the primary school to support the provision of laptops for home learning. It transpired that multiple families in the parish were struggling with home learning. The Parish supported the grant which supplied multiple laptops that will be used by the school when things return to normal. Additionally, the parish council promoted a community drive for old devices to be donated. This saw a further 6/7 devices donated and an additional anonymous donation of £500.*
- *Supported local organisations financially.*

Key themes from the Community Survey	Number of comments
Financial support/grants	1
Advice and Information	2
Practical help for self-isolating (food, prescriptions, etc)	9
Virtual contact/addressing loneliness and isolation	7
Supported/increased volunteering	1

Examples from the Community Survey

- *We have created new support outdoor groups to support those struggling with isolation and loneliness.*
- *Wide range of support to older people, and their carers, including those with a dementia. Face to face closed during lockdown but moved all support online or phone plus mailouts of activity packs*
- *Weekly fun, engaging music sessions over zoom for more vulnerable people in the community e.g. unemployed, health conditions, living alone/isolated. 1:1 support over phone to help unemployed people move towards training, education or employment. Provided a safe place for people to be each week to meet like-minded people, connect to others and the music and develop skills in music, communication etc.*
- *Detached youth work.*

Question - Examples of good practice in your response you can share from your local community.

The surveys asked for examples of good practice that could be shared. There were a wide range of examples of support and these included both well-being and practical support for residents. The main themes and several examples are detailed below for both surveys.

Key themes from the Members Survey	Number of comments
Community working together	7
Development of volunteer groups / increased volunteering	2
Increased communication (social media, newsletters, etc)	3
Practical support (food, prescriptions, etc)	3

Examples from the Members Survey

- *All the local food service businesses took over making sure everyone vulnerable or shielding was fed or had food. The local doctors' surgery also made sure their vulnerable patients were looked after by someone.*
- *Just the willingness to participate in activities supporting the vulnerable in our community, bringing together different community groups like the parish council, church, and medical centre, acting as liaison.*
- *Loads - food banks, breakfast / food clubs for children.*

Key themes from the Community Survey	Number of comments
Community working together	4
Development of volunteer groups / increased volunteering	1
Increased communication (social media, newsletters, etc)	3
Practical support (food, prescriptions, etc)	1

Examples from the Community Survey

- *Superb initial response for local groups, individual's and business. We had a database of over 500 who sprang into action to help at the start of lockdown.*
- *Providing support for families and ensuring they were aware they could contact our charity when they needed, even during lockdowns.*
- *We were very focussed on safety, we utilised Whatsapp to put out requests for help for our residents but then only shared the individual residents information with the volunteer doing the job to ensure vulnerable people's information was shared only on a need to know basis. Each volunteer also had to fill out a form prior to being added to the Whatsapp group which had our 'rules' surrounding safety and best practice.*

Question – What would you consider is your biggest achievement during the pandemic, which should be recorded?

The surveys asked for each organisation's biggest achievement to be recorded. The main themes from both surveys and several examples are detailed below.

Key themes from the Members Survey	Number of comments
Partnership working	2
Support for the local community / vulnerable people	7
Developing/increased communication and information	4
Continuing with day to day activities	7

Examples from the Members Survey

- *Information dissemination and delivery of over 90 Christmas hampers to free school meal families in [named area] and surrounding area.*
- *As a council we have become more professional, more efficient and more engaged.*
- *Keeping the public toilets open so supporting local café when allowed also trades and local people. We progressed the town roads development plan through partnership zoom meetings, initiated a programme of work on the Town Hall and overall kept business as usual.*

Key themes from the Community Survey	Number of comments
Partnership working	1
Support for the local community / vulnerable people	9
Developing/increased communication and information	2
Continuing with day to day activities	7

Examples from the Community Survey

- *The delivery to date of over 2,000 meals.*
- *How the independent foodbanks responded to enormous challenge - some had to change most of the volunteers, some had to change premises, some had to move to a delivery model - there was a period where they struggled to get sufficient food as the supermarkets but they kept working, serving & adapting. By networking them together we could also share supports & information which helped them (this is continuing). They did all this whilst also seeing huge increase in demand for their services.*
- *The speed of our response in the initial lockdown, we set up an emergency shopping and prescriptions service right away, long before the supermarkets got in to gear and supported over 200 people in the initial first months.*

Question – How will you ensure the valuable work will not be lost and will continue for the wellbeing of your communities?

The surveys asked for suggestions to ensure that the work undertaken would continue. The main themes from both surveys and several examples are detailed below.

Key themes from the Members Survey	Number of comments
Continuing support for volunteers	1
Continued improved communication and information sharing	3
Continued partnership working	2
Recognition of achievements	2
Continuation of day to day activities	6

Examples from the Members Survey

- *Better communication with community groups, improved use of social media and online meetings.*
- *We have planned for a plaque to be presented to key volunteers and the village shop, when safe to do so, so that this achievement will be visible for years to come in the centre of the village.*
- *Sustainable food project launched to identify where the Parish Council can support existing provision for food support and bridge any gaps in provision.*
- *The store cupboard work continues and will do so after the pandemic.*

Key themes from the Community Survey	Number of comments
Continuing support for volunteers	4
Continued improved communication and information sharing	4
Continued partnership working	1
Continuation of day to day activities	5
Funding constraints/requirements for continuing activities	6

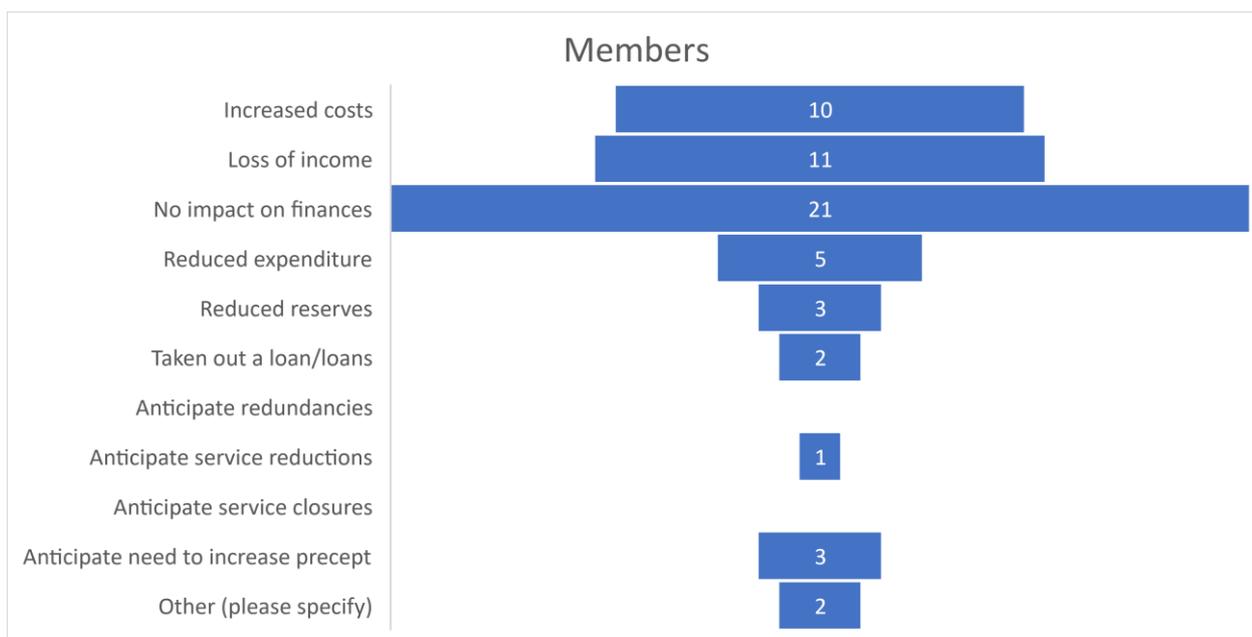
Examples from the Community Survey

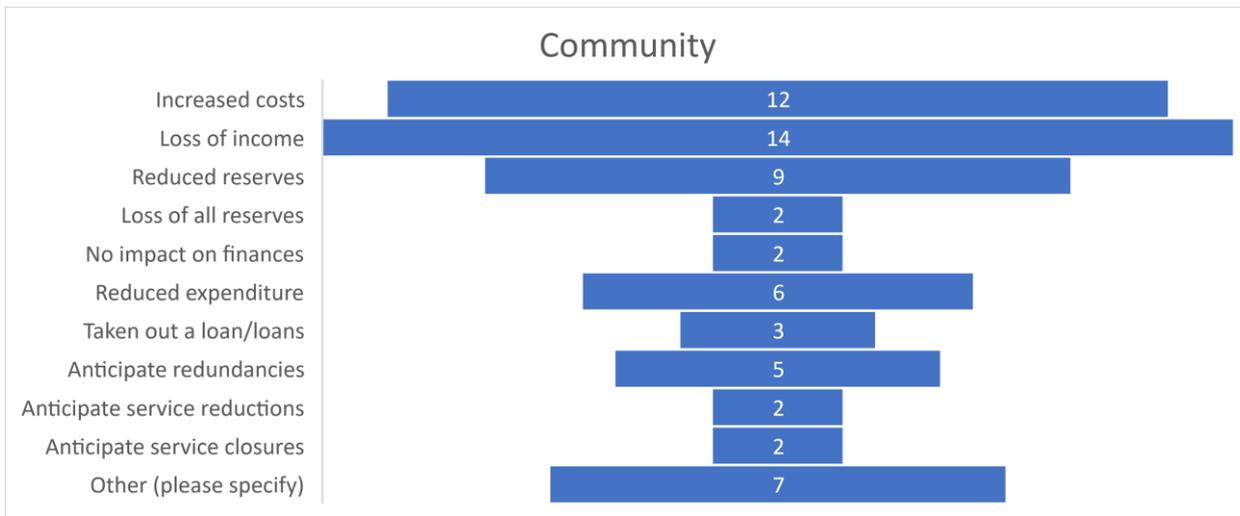
- *We ran an Appeal for Change to our members last year and raised £25,000. We are currently seeking further grant aid to ensure the projects started through the pandemic can continue and even grow and expand, as the demand for well-being support continues to grow.*
- *The committee will meet as soon as we can meet face to face to review lessons learned. We have recruited more volunteers who will stay with us.*
- *We have seen how the lockdowns have affected the mental health of clients and families, we will continue to support them and be as flexible with our approach to support individual needs.*
- *Grant applications, future proofing.*

4. Financial Impact

Question - How were your finances impacted?

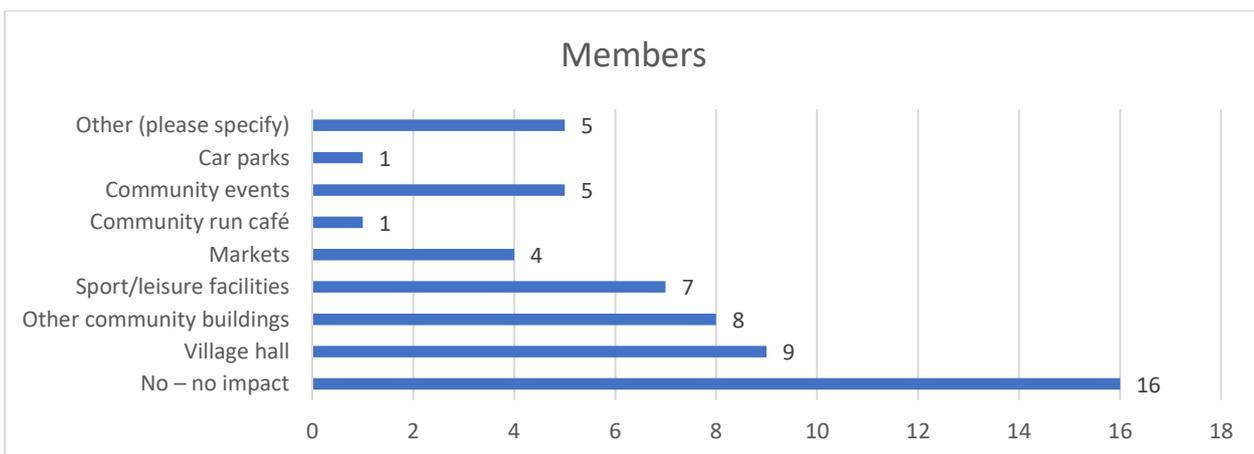
The pandemic has had a significant financial impact on many sectors and the survey wanted to gauge the impact that the pandemic had on both member and community organisations. Of the 37 member organisations that responded, 21 (57%) stated that the pandemic had not affected their finances. This contrasts with the impact on community groups where only 2 organisations (8%) from the 26 responses identified no impact. None of the members anticipated any redundancies or service closures but of the 37 responses 10 (27%) were expecting increased costs and 11 (30%) loss of income. Of the 26 community responses 12 (46%) were expecting increased costs and 14 (54%) loss of income.



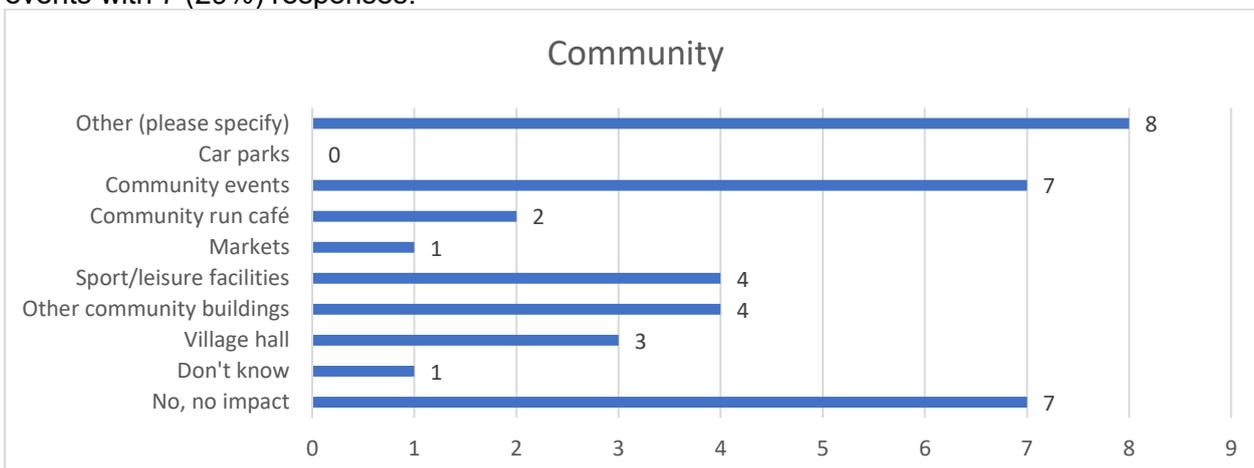


Question - Have you had to close any income generating facilities in your community (choose all that apply)?

Organisations were asked what the impact had been on income generating facilities in the community. Of the 33 member responses just under half (16) said that there had been no impact. Of the facilities impacted the most significant were village halls (9), other community buildings (8) and sports/leisure facilities (7).

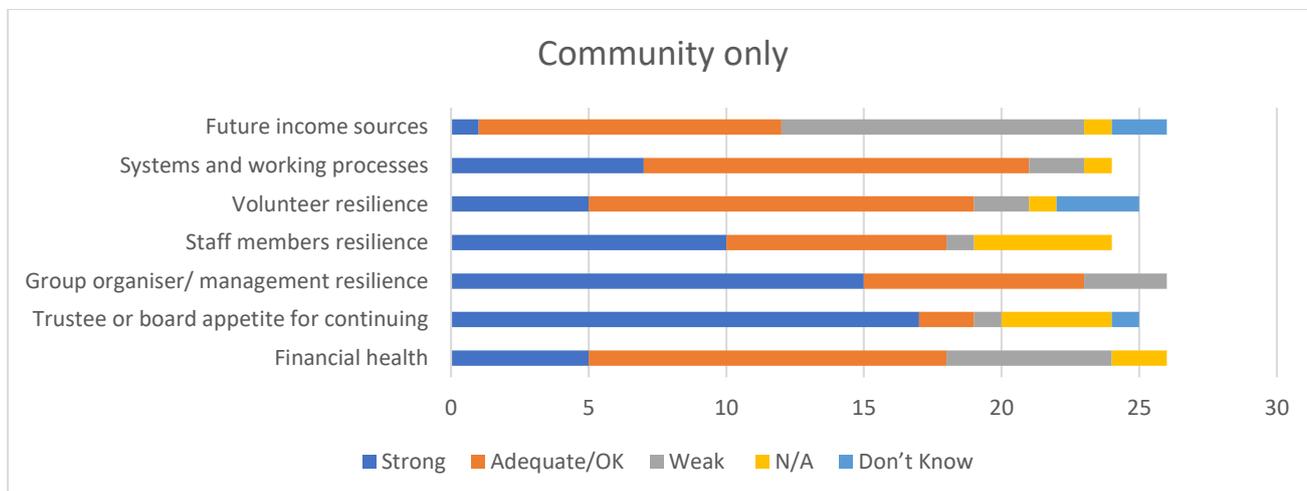


There were 24 responses from the community survey of which 7 (29%) stated that there had been no impact on income generating facilities. 8 responses identified 'other' income generating facilities being affected. When these were looked at in more detail these included the postponement of fundraising events, closures of churches and face to face services. Also affected were community events with 7 (29%) responses.



Question – How do you rate your organisation’s health?

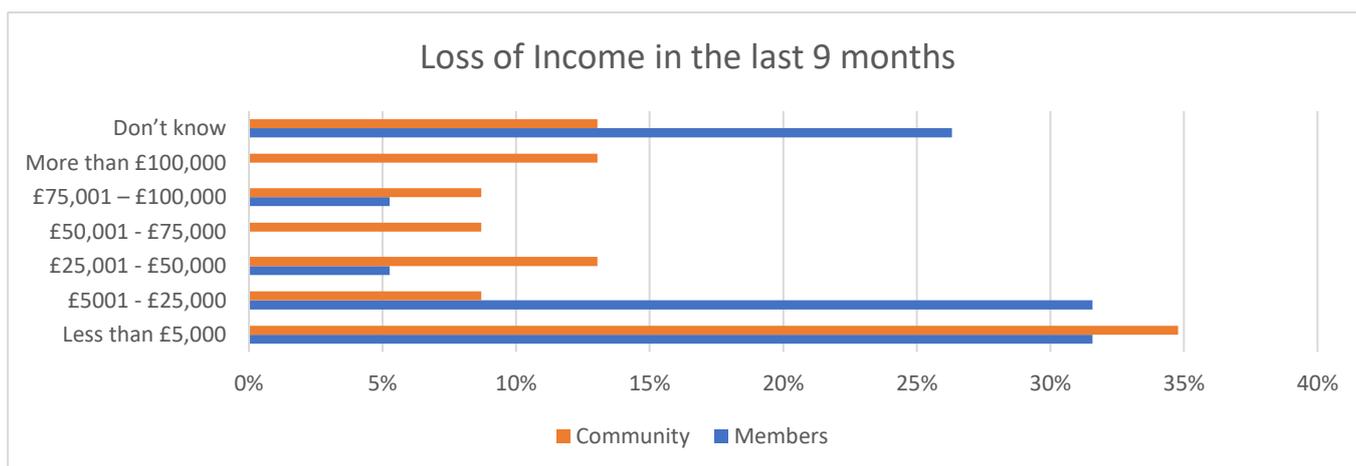
This question was asked of the community organisations only. It wanted to assess organisational health across a range of areas. The areas that were identified as strong were those relating to the staff and management resilience along with the appetite from trustees or the board to continue. The weakest areas of organisational health are identified as future income sources along with the impact on financial health.



Question - How much do you estimate has been lost in the last 9 months (April to end December 2020)?

The survey explored the estimated financial loss for organisations over the last 9 months. There were responses from 19 members and 23 community organisations. The graph below shows the response for both surveys.

Approximately 30% for both members and community organisations have estimated a loss of less than £5,000. Of the 23 community organisations who responded 43% (10) estimated a loss of more than £25,000. Of these 10 there was 1 organisation anticipating a loss of more than £100,000. Of the 19 members who responded 10% (2) estimated a loss of more than £25,000.



For reference, the table below identifies the number of organisations responding to each category. The total number of responses are in brackets.

Response Numbers	Less than £5,000	£5001 – £25,000	£25,001 - £50,000	£50,001 - £75,000	£75,001 - £100,000	More than £100,000	Don't know
Members (19)	6	6	1	0	1	0	5
Community (23)	8	2	3	2	2	3	3

The table clearly demonstrates the fact that the pandemic had relatively little impact on the finances of town and parish councils, but it had a more mixed impact within the voluntary and community sector. This may be a result of the diversity within the voluntary and community sector. Groups and organisations able to tailor their services to meet pandemic-related needs (such as health and care needs e.g. befriending, mental health support) may have found it easier to access grants and ongoing funding streams. Other types of community activity may have had to stop due to restrictions and as a result income could have been lost.

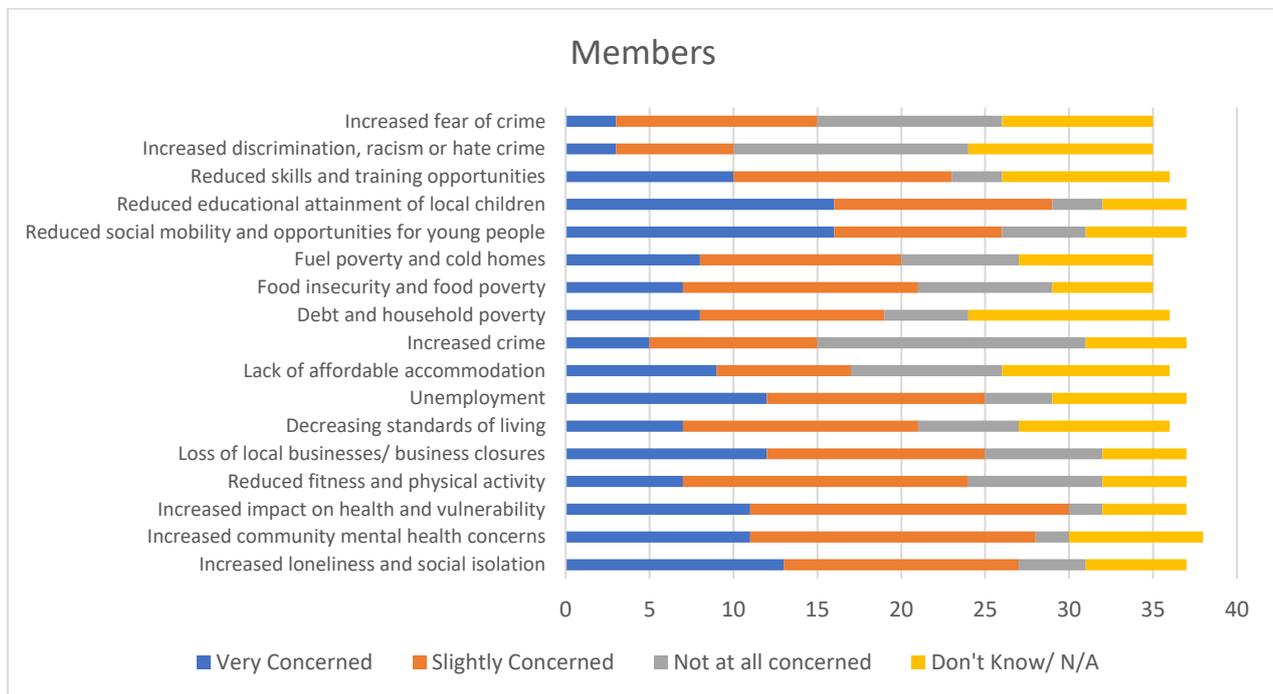
5. Impact of the pandemic and working in partnership

Question - Do you have any concerns about the potential long-term impacts of the pandemic on the people living in your community?

The survey was designed to understand what the potential long-term impacts may be on the community. Organisations were asked to identify all of those that applied. 38 members and 25 community organisations answered this question.

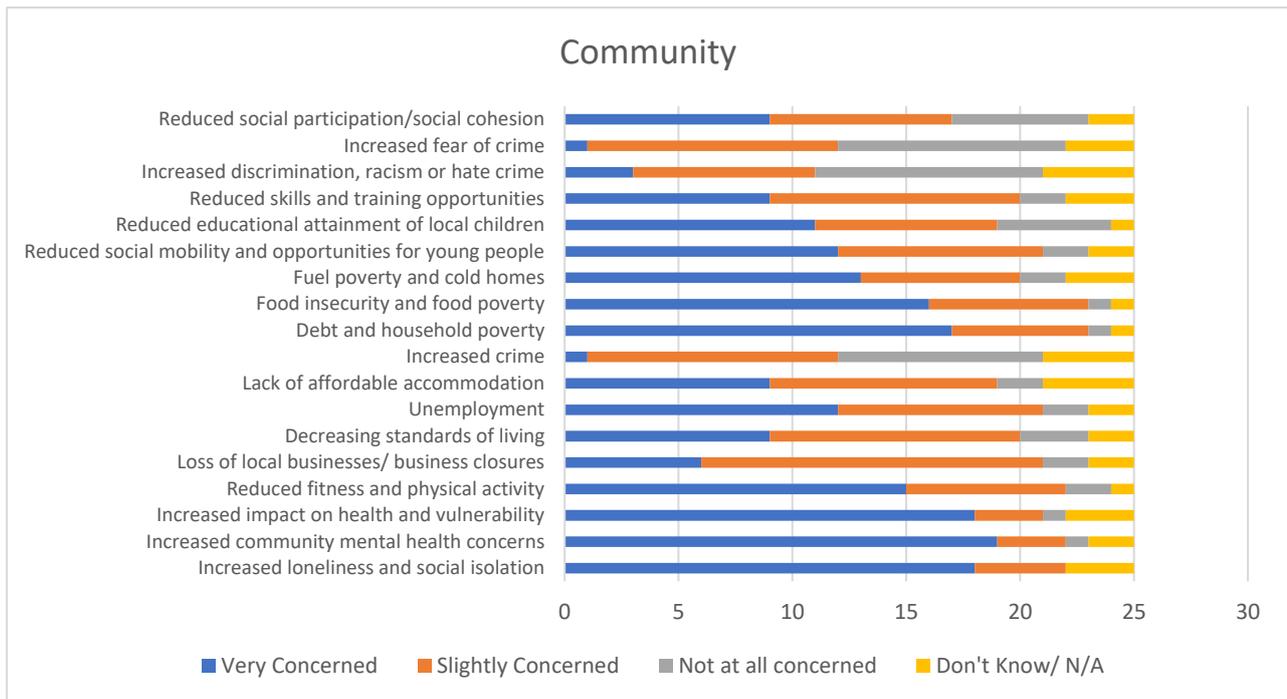
The areas which SALC members identified as the highest levels of concern, using the combined scores for strong concern and slight concern, were identified as:

- Increased impact on health and vulnerability (30 of 38 respondents or 79%)
- Reduced educational attainment of local children (29 of 38 respondents or 76%)
- Increased community mental health concerns (28 of 38 respondents or 74%)
- Increased loneliness and isolation (27 of 38 respondents or 71%)
- Reduced social mobility and opportunities for young people (26 of 38 respondents or 68%)



The areas that community organisations identified the highest levels of concern, using the combined scores for strong concern and slight concern, were identified as:

- Food insecurity and food poverty (23 of 25 respondents or 92%)
- Debt and household poverty (23 of 25 respondents or 92%)
- Increased community mental health concerns (22 of 25 respondents or 88%)
- Increased loneliness and social isolation (22 of 25 respondents or 88%)
- Reduced fitness and physical activity (22 of 25 respondents or 88%)



The differences between the two sets of results are quite interesting and probably reflect the nature of the work carried out by town and parish councils compared to voluntary and community sector groups and organisations. The community organisations seem to focus priorities around ensuring some basic human needs are met; food, income/employment and mental health and wellbeing. Town and parish councils, on the other hand, seem to focus more on population needs and planning for the future, considering issues such as the impact on children and young people, educational attainment, social mobility etc. These differences in prioritisation may, together, be complementary and highlight the importance of local partnerships: bringing community leaders together with different, but equally important and essential considerations.

Question – Thinking about access to food, food poverty and food insecurity, has your group or organisation identified any need within the local area? (Community survey only)

The community survey asked a specific question relating to food poverty. This area scored highest in the previous question when they were asked about long-term impacts from the pandemic. Comments indicate that community organisations were already supporting people with access to food prior to the pandemic. This support increased during the pandemic as more people were not as easily able to access food due to shielding and/or financial pressures.

Example comments:

- *We have been working with the food poverty alliance but the impact on older people is less visible as they do not present at foodbanks, but some do arrive in hospital with malnutrition.*
- *Yes - we had a number of elderly residents who were unable to either go shopping themselves, or were unable to order online (as they don't use the internet), or didn't have a neighbour / friend/ relative who could do this for them (or their neighbours / friends / relatives were having to self-isolate). This is why we set up our Meals on Wheels project.*
- *Yes, young people that aren't in school so no access to free school meals. No school meals during holidays.*
- *Those newly injured or those with long term conditions struggle with applying for benefits and the delay in payment of those benefits means that we as an organisation have seen a significant increase in use of food banks for all our clients.*

Question - What support is available in your local area for those individuals or families who may be facing hardship (e.g. breakfast clubs, food projects, debt advice)? (Community survey only)

Another question was asked within the community survey to better understand support available for those facing hardship.

Key themes from the Community Survey	Number of comments
Support/deliver a local food bank / food share	13
Financial support	3
Information and guidance	2
Transport and accessibility	1

Example comments:

- *We have a lot of support available locally and it is communicated to those in need. However, take up is not always high. We have been working hard to build trust and relationships with individuals who access the foodbanks, but it is a slow journey. However, the rewards are long lasting and life changing.*
- *Foodbanks in all the market towns and now some in the more rural areas. Most areas made some response to feeding children in the autumn half term and Christmas who were on free school meals.*
- *These things do exist, but are never enough.*

The results suggest that support for people to access food is in place but few of the survey respondents referenced other types of emergency support and support for those facing hardship.

Question - How are you working in partnership with the following?

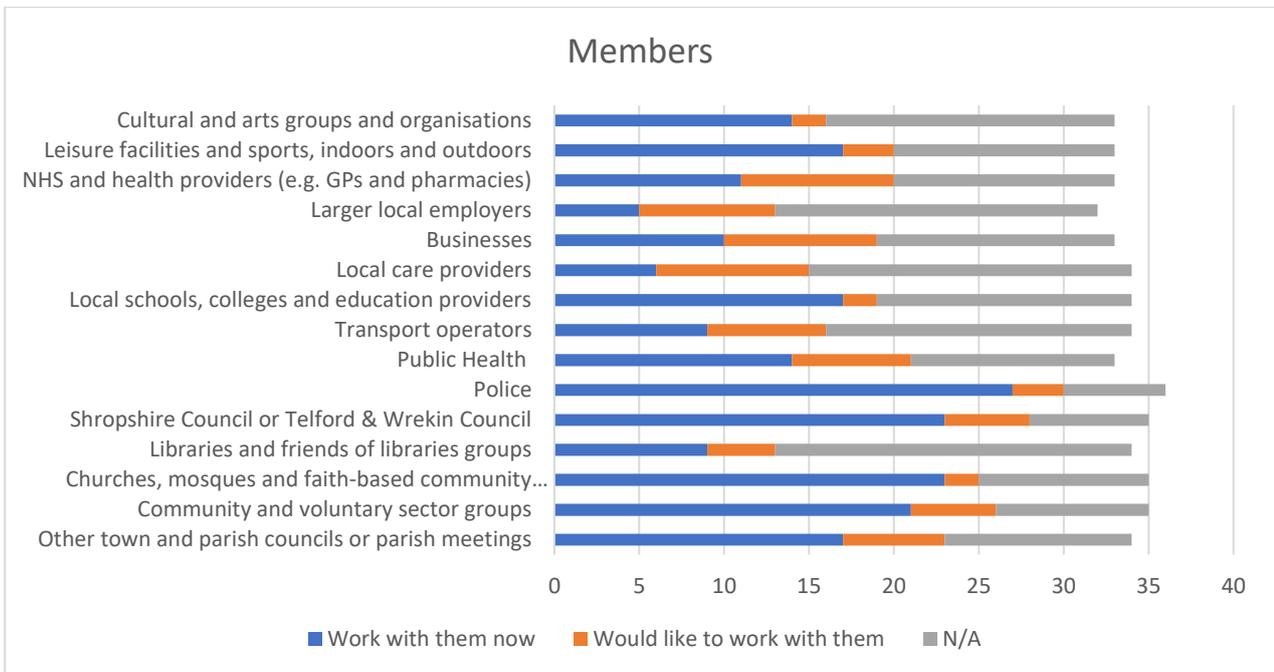
The survey asked both members and community organisations about current and future partnership working with specific types of organisation. 37 members and 26 community organisations responded to this question.

From the responses from the members survey it seems as though strong partnerships are in place with the Police, local councils and faith groups (as well as other groups). The survey shows that;

- 27 of the 37 (73%) member organisations are already working with the police
- 23 of the 37 (62%) are already working with Shropshire and/or Telford and Wrekin Council
- 23 of the 37 (62%) are already working with churches, mosques and faith-based community groups.

The survey indicates that members would like to foster closer partnership with businesses. The survey shows that;

- 9 of the 37(24%) member organisations would like to work with the categories of NHS and health providers, local care providers and businesses and that 8 (22%) would like to work with larger local businesses.

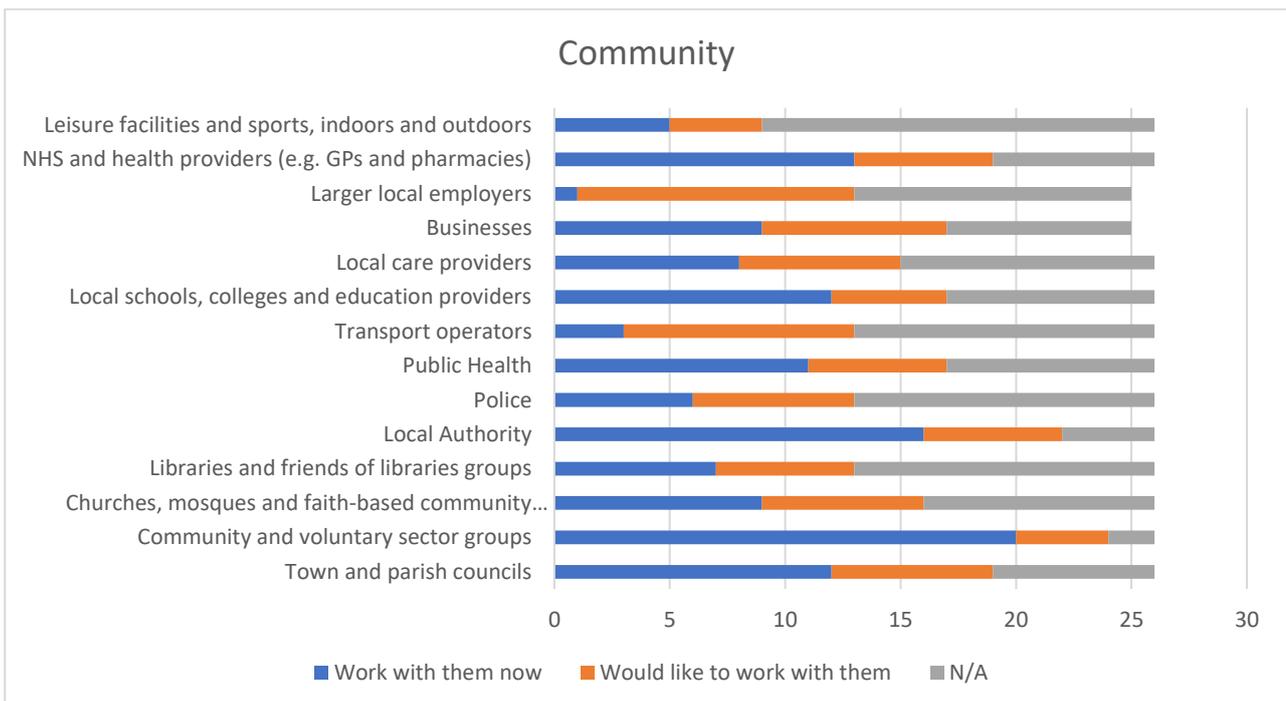


The community responses identify strong partnerships are in place with community and voluntary sector groups and the local authority along with other groups. The survey shows that;

- 20 of the 26 (77%) community organisations are already working with community and voluntary sector groups.
- 16 of the 26 (62%) are already working with the local authority.

The community organisations wish to develop stronger partnerships across the board, but two key sectors are identified.

- 12 of the 26 (46%) who responded would like to work with larger local employers
- 10 of the 26 (38%) would like to work with transport operators.

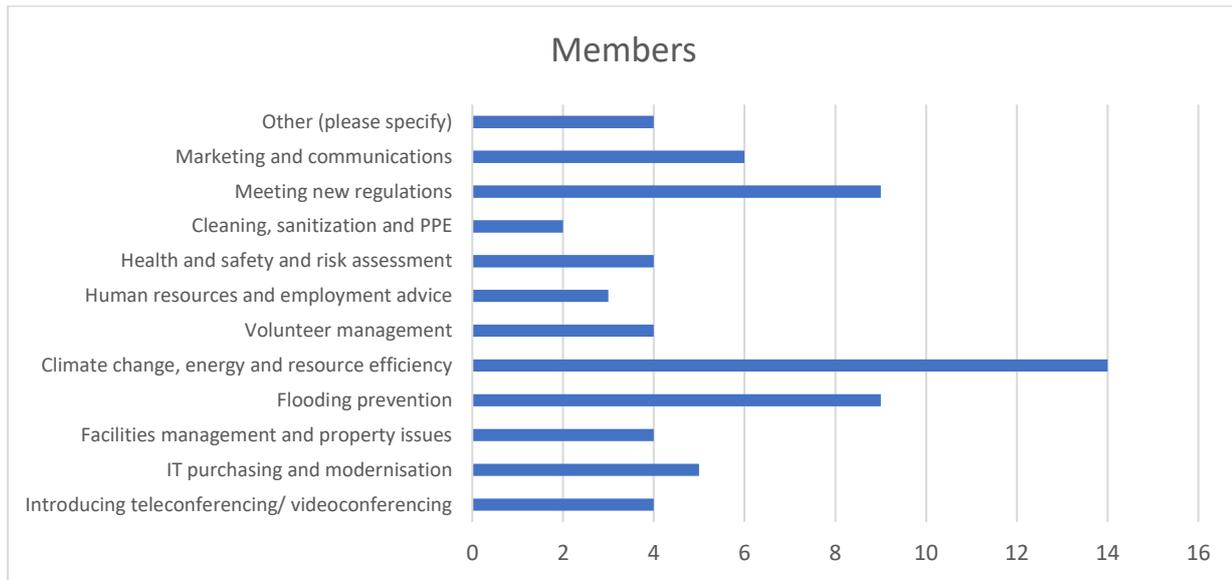


Question - Do you have any guidance and support needs, in the following areas (choose all that apply)?

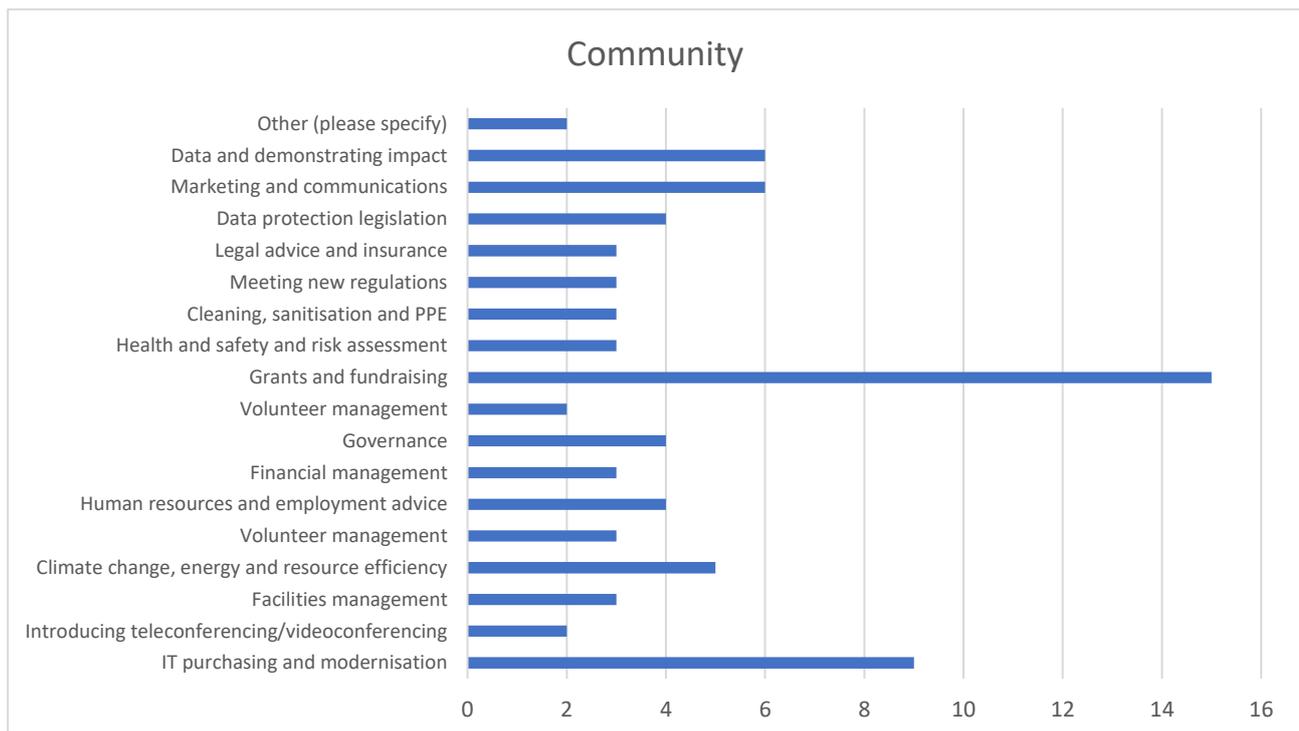
The survey asked for feedback on identified support needs from both SALC members and community organisations. 24 members and 21 community organisations responded to this question.

24 of the 39 members, or 62%, responded to this question identifying guidance and support needs. Support was required in all areas but the three areas where support was most evident were;

- Climate change, energy and resource efficiency, 14 of the 24 (58%) of responses
- Meeting new regulations, 9 of the 14 (36%) of responses
- Flooding prevention, 9 of the 14 (36%) of responses



21 of the 28 community organisations, or 75%, responded to this question identifying guidance and support needs. Support was required in all areas, but it was most evident was for grants and fundraising where 15 of the 21 respondents (71%) identified support needs. 9 organisations (43%) also identified IT purchasing and modernisation as an area for guidance and support needs.



Question - The importance of equality and diversity considerations has been highlighted throughout the pandemic response. Do you have any good examples of how your local community has worked to be inclusive and mitigate discrimination against groupings in your community?

The survey was developed to understand how organisations ensured they were working with all groupings in their community in an inclusive way. This question was responded to by 10 (25%) of the SALC members and 14 (50%) of the community organisations.

Themes from the Community Survey	Number of comments
Actively working with all communities	4
Using knowledge of local needs	1
Targeting specific groups/individuals	3
Limited diversity in Shropshire	2
No / Not applicable	4

Example comments;

- *We have helped everyone who has asked for our assistance without judgement or discrimination and in a timely manner.*
- *Setting up an LGBT befriending service in partnership with SAND. Looking at digital exclusion as a priority. Recruited new trustees from BAME communities.*
- *We don't have much diversity in our small rural villages here in Shropshire.*

Themes from the Members Survey	Number of comments
Actively working with all communities	2
Targeting specific groups/individuals	3
No / Not applicable	5

Example comments;

- *Having a team of active volunteers who have built relationships with previously hard to reach sections of our community has meant that we are now in touch with a wider number of groups within the community.*
- *Volunteer groups have concentrated on the elderly.*
- *Not aware of any problems.*

Overall, the feedback suggests that diversity and inclusion are not currently a key area of focus for most survey respondents. The full impact of the pandemic is not yet known but national research suggests that it may lead to greater inequality. This topic may need to be something considered in more detail to ensure the needs of people with different backgrounds and different needs do not go unseen and unmet. A second question followed a similar theme.

Question – Are there any more actions that are needed through local partnerships to help meet the three national equality aims? Eliminating discrimination, harassment and victimisation Advancing equality of opportunity Fostering good relations?

This question was answered by 12 of the 39 SALC members (31%) and 12 of the 28 community organisations (43%). The results from the community survey shown in the table below show that very few responded to the question, and of those that did the actions people felt would be most helpful to meet equality aims were community/partnership working and support for specific communities (e.g. BAME, homeless). The comments were helpful but quite different and no clear themes emerged from the feedback.

Themes from Community Survey	Number of comments
Improved information/training on equalities	1
Community/partnership working	4
Support for specific communities (eg, BAME, homeless)	3
No /Don't know	4

Example comments;

- *More action towards partnering community groups with the right businesses/local authority to have mutually beneficial results.*
- *Better understanding of the needs/wants of BAME communities. Support for digital inclusion for older people as well as young.*
- *Encourage the feeling of trust between groups and individuals to do the right thing and to be able to work out what the right thing to do is.*

Themes from Members Survey	Number of comments
Improved information/training on equalities	2
Community/partnership working	4
Support for specific communities (eg, BAME, homeless)	1
No /Don't know	5

Example comments;

- *Training for Councillors.*
- *Continue the partnership work we are doing building relationships with our community so that they talk to us.*
- *No reported issues in this parish.*

The feedback from SALC members was similar to the feedback from community groups and organisations and suggests that equality issues are not currently being raised as a concern within local communities.

Question - Have there been any positive impacts of the pandemic within your community (choose all that apply)?

Organisations were asked to reflect on any positive impacts from the pandemic. 32 of the 39 (82%) SALC members and 25 of the 28 (89%) community organisations responded to this question. It is evident from the responses from the SALC members that the pandemic has had many positive impacts on the community. The most significant of these being;

- 29 of the 32 respondents (90%) said community members were supporting each other (kindness).
- 23 of the respondents (72%) identified increased volunteering.
- 21 of the respondents (66%) felt local services were being recognised.

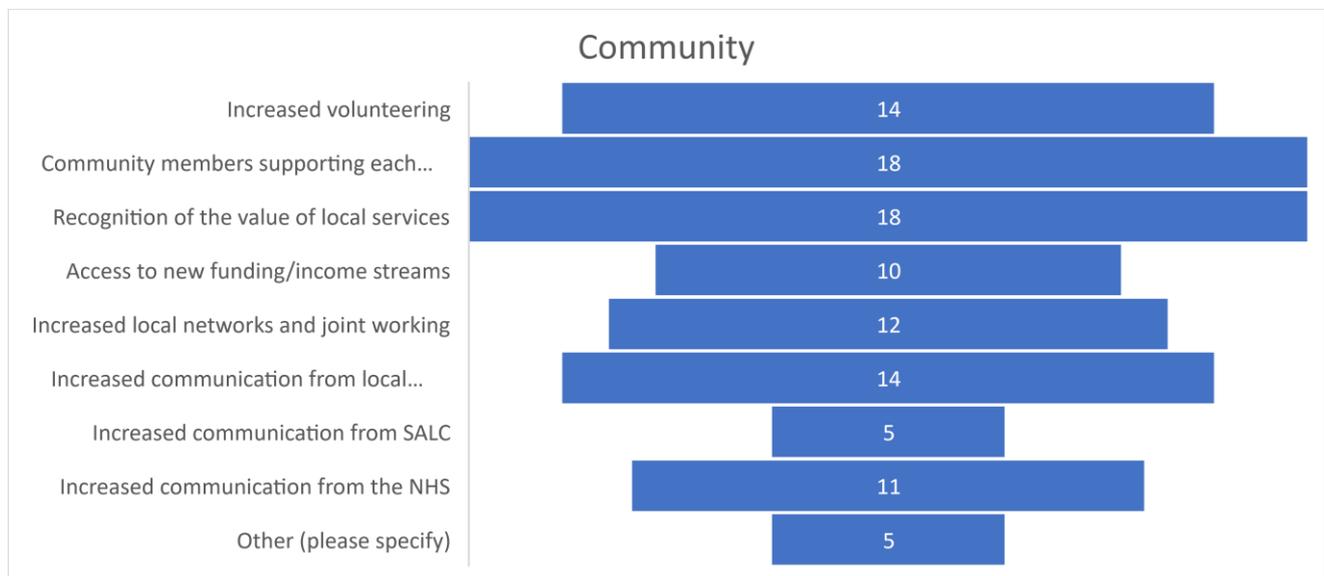


Example comments;

- *Folk are more aware of friends and neighbours, the importance and interdependency of businesses with community life and wellbeing, the wealth of community spirit and willingness to volunteer including establishing a new large village hall committee*
- *Members of the community just helping neighbours out and talking to neighbours more, because of busy lives this may never have happened before.*
- *Decreased traffic and associated noise, increase in rarer bird species*
- *Strong local community has got stronger - local shops have been supported more*

When reviewing the responses from the community survey the same three answers also scored the highest along with increased communication from the local authority.

- 18 of the 25 respondents (72%) said community members were supporting each other (kindness)
- 14 of the respondents (56%) identified increased volunteering
- 18 of the respondents (72%) felt local services were being recognised
- 14 of the respondents (56%) identified increased communication from the local authority



Example comments;

- *Great networking, better engagement from businesses and corporates, great support from Shropshire council. Better recognition of the role of the sector from the NHS*
- *Recognition that working together is better! Recognition that poverty, which had been hidden, is now there for all to see. Increased kindness & generosity Recognition of the impact of loneliness & isolation and the need to address this - communities are at the heart of this (Compassionate Community schemes are great for this)*
- *Disabled people find they are more part of the community as online meetings are the norm, less travel to meet people means less time, energy, carbon waste and cleaner air and less noise*
- *The newsletters that have come out have been helpful keeping up with what is going on in the local communities*

It is encouraging to see that there are some positive impacts from the pandemic and that those positives are being recognised by town and parish councils and community groups and organisations despite the pressures being faced in communities.

Question - Please consider the following statements relating to community resilience.

The survey asked organisations to respond to statements relating to community resilience and to what extent they agreed with them or not. 36 members and 26 community organisations responded to the statements. The areas which members identified as the highest levels of agreement, using the combined scores for strongly agree and agree, were identified as:

- 33 of the 36 members (92%) agreed that people in the community are happy to help out when asked.
- 31 of the 36 members (86%) agreed that people in the community get on well together

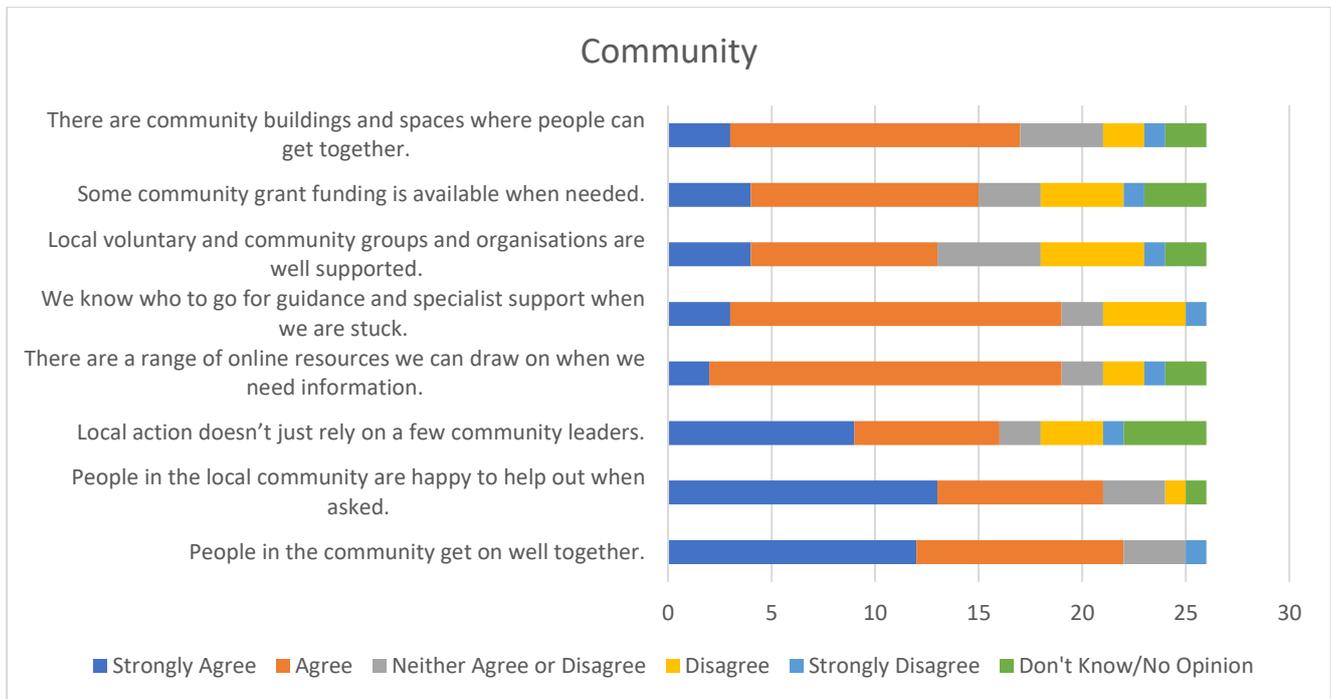
Considering any areas of disagreement is also important. Some of the survey respondents disagreed with the statement 'local action doesn't just rely on a few community leaders'. This suggests that there are individuals within our local communities taking on considerable responsibilities and being relied on for their leadership. The risk with a few people taking on a lot is that they may suffer 'burn out' from an ongoing pandemic and should they be unable to continue their work, others may not be able to step in and support. Perhaps action is needed to understand where people feel under pressure and consider actions that can be put in place to generate greater support.



The areas which community organisations identified as the highest levels of agreement, using the combined scores for strongly agree and agree, were consistent with the members response:

- 21 of the 26 members (81%) agreed that people in the community are happy to help out when asked.
- 22 of the 26 members (85%) agreed that people in the community get on well together

Community survey respondents highlighted two main areas where there was some disagreement with the statements. There are some who don't feel local community groups and voluntary organisations are well supported and some who don't know where to go for guidance and specialist support when they are stuck. The limited levels of voluntary and community sector infrastructure support in Shropshire has been a concern for a number of years and is one of the priority areas being highlighted by Shropshire Voluntary and Community Sector Assembly.



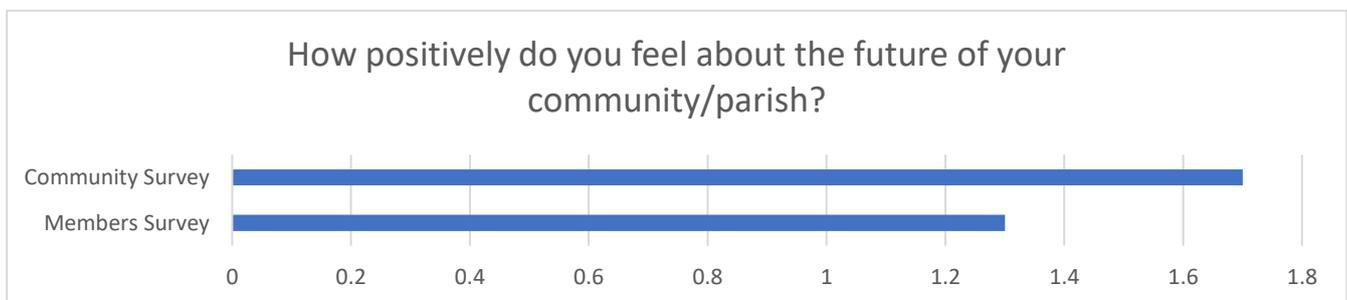
Question- If you selected disagree or strongly disagree, please explain why and consider if there is any action needed to address any concerns?

The organisations were asked to explain why they disagreed with any of the previous statements and identify and actions needed to overcome their concerns. There were few responses to this question, with only 5 members and 4 community organisations answering. This may in part be due to the limited number of organisations who disagreed with the statements posed.

Comments from the members survey included the need for more residents to participate in local action and not be left to the “same few people”. Comments from the community survey included the need for recognition and funding to support local activities, especially those being delivered by smaller charities.

Question - On this scale, mark how positively you feel about the future of your community/parish?

To gauge their level of positivity towards the future of their community or parish all organisations were asked to provide a score out of 5, where 5 was ‘very concerned’ and 0 was ‘very optimistic’. The lower the scores the more positive the results. 32 of the 39 members and 24 of the 28 community organisations responded to this question. The results for both the members survey and community survey are detailed below.



The results show that the respondents to the members survey were more positive about their future than those responding to the community survey albeit both were positive. The average score for the community survey was 1.7 and the score for the members survey was 1.3. This suggests that most felt optimistic or neutral. 6 community survey respondents were concerned for the future and 4 SALC members were concerned for the future.

6. Other comments including ambitions and opportunities for the future

Organisations were given the opportunity to provide additional comments at the end of the report where they felt these had not yet been covered. 9 comments were received from members and 12 were received from community organisations. The comments have been grouped into the following themes;

Key themes from the Members Survey	Number of comments
Concern over viability of services	2
Return to day to day services/priorities	3
Improved partnership working	1
Other	4

Example comments

- *The last 12 months have been very difficult, we continued to offer a service albeit changed during lockdowns, i just hope smaller charities like ours can survive.*
- *I have a MAJOR concern that the Covid pandemic has got in the way of building a robust community response to the current accelerating CLIMATE and BIODIVERSITY emergency. In some ways it has made it worse - the use of disposable plastic PPE will have massively burdened the environment unless great care has been taken in managing the increased waste streams. I hope the effort to manage Covid has not exhausted our community impulses, just when they will be most needed.*
- *We wish to get our village hall re-opened and holding community events asap.*

Key themes from the Communities Survey	Number of comments
Continued community spirit	2
Return to day to day services/priorities	4
Improved partnership working	1
Other	2

Example comments

- *More trust from Shropshire Council to allow us to manage services in our own towns. Our Covid response shows that we can do this.*
- *Hopefully, in the future Community Spirit will remain strong and as a result Community Engagement will be enhanced.*
- *Development of a climate emergency action plan and finalise the road design and implementation plan.*

7. Conclusion

Although the two surveys did not result in a large number of responses (67 in total), the feedback received was really valuable and has generated a good understanding of some of the experiences within local communities during the Covid-19 pandemic. The comments and examples provided were really helpful and many thanks are due to the SALC members and voluntary and community groups and organisations who took the time to complete the surveys. The results highlight a number of key points:

- Most survey respondents found that the pandemic had a significant impact within their community and on their town or parish council, parish meeting, voluntary organisation or community group. The respondents also highlighted that the impacts were wide ranging, impacting on the ways in which services were delivered, the types of services delivered (with some activities stopping and others being put in place), the way organisational/group planning was undertaken and changing priorities.

- The majority found that activities moved, as much as possible online in order to minimise the transmission of the virus and limit the amount of work required to implement social distancing and other types of restrictions and safety measures.
- Many responses highlighted how important IT infrastructure and equipment became.
- Some of the community respondents were concerned about increased demand for support and expressed concern over their ability to sustain activities and support services over the long term.
- The survey responses from both surveys highlighted that the pandemic generated some new partnerships at community level and how important that joint working was.
- Both SALC members and community respondents indicated that the pandemic response had meant a focus on emergency support for the most vulnerable people and those needing to isolate at home. The provision of food and medicine seems to have been a common response across all the communities within the survey sample.
- Aside from the provision of food and medicine, social media was another area of development because it offered a way of providing community level information, advice and reassurance. Examples include reference to active and expanding social media groups used to connect people without the need for face to face contact.
- The majority of survey respondents did not just support individuals and families within their communities but most also supported other local groups and organisations.
- Successes achieved include working more closely together, more communication, increased volunteering, organisation of practical support, access to grants, and a recognition of the value of local services. Many also commented on the kindness people displayed and willingness to help others at a time of need.
- There is a recognition within the survey feedback that SALC members and community respondents kept going in despite of challenges and were successful in their work to ensure support was put in place to help those who were vulnerable.
- Considering the concerns now in place, the areas of greatest concern within the survey feedback seem to be around the financial impact of the pandemic (loss of income and increased costs), particularly on village halls, community buildings, community events and activities and voluntary and community sector organisations.
- Obtaining future income is a concern expressed within the survey results.
- When asked about the concerns and priorities for the future, the community organisations seem to focus priorities around ensuring some basic human needs are met; food, income/employment and mental health and wellbeing. Town and parish councils, on the other hand, seem to focus more on population needs and planning for the future, considering issues such as the impact on children and young people, educational attainment and social mobility.
- Food provision was a clear focus while vulnerable members of the community were at risk and socially isolating, but a few of the survey respondents seem uncertain over the future needs of the community and whether socio-economic impacts of the pandemic will mean needs increase.
- Partnership was one of the themes explored within the survey questions for both SALC members and community groups and organisations. The feedback suggests that partnerships are in place between the voluntary and community sector, SALC members and public sector organisations. The main area of development mentioned was the opportunity to grow partnerships with business and local employers.
- Questions on diversity, inclusion and equality suggest these are not currently issues being highlighted within local communities and are not an area of focus. This is perhaps an issue to come back to in order to understand more. National research does highlight concern over the potential of increased inequality post-pandemic. Despite this feedback, there is a strong recognition of the importance of engagement, and on meeting the needs of local people.
- The survey highlighted that SALC members and voluntary and community sector groups and organisations themselves need some support. The voluntary sector highlights the need for financial support and grants, and access to specialist advice. SALC members mention support planning for the future and climate change is an example given as a future challenge and issue that will require increased knowledge and action.
- Challenges for future consideration include a few concerns from SALC members that a small number of community leaders are relied on to do a lot within their communities (and may need more people to support). Despite this there was positive feedback from all about community

resilience and cohesiveness. Both groups of respondents feel people get on well together in their communities and help-out when asked.

- Overall, the feedback and comments highlight a strong commitment to continue local action and provide support. There are some mixed feelings about the future, and an enthusiasm to return to day to day services and priorities (moving away from the pressures of an emergency response). However, despite the wish to return to a more usual way of living and working, the survey feedback demonstrates that there is hope that increased feelings and displays of community spirit and unity may be retained.

Analysis and report produced for SALC by the Feedback and Insight Team, Shropshire Council. June 2021.