

**Devon Communities Together
COVID19 Community Local
Outbreak & Recovery Helpline**
Supporting Village Halls, Community
Buildings, Parish and Town Councils.

Monthly Report
March 2021



Covid-19 Community Local
Outbreak & Recovery Helpline
From Devon Communities
Together

Supporting Village Halls, Community
Buildings, Parish and Town Councils
into the recovery phase

Call 0808 1963390



Helping Communities Help
Themselves for 60 Years



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1.0 Phase 4 – Summary of Covid 19 activities March 2021

By March 2021, the major part of queries that came to the Devon Communities Together (DCT) Helpline had changed from queries about what halls, community buildings and communities *couldn't* do during lockdown, to what they *can* do, when they can re-open and what financial assistance there may be to help them restart. The Government issued guidance in March for local authorities about eligibility for the Restart grant and the £425 million national top-up to the Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) for the period starting 1st April 2021. The Restart grant is a one-off grant designed to support businesses that support in-person services, of up to £18,000 for hospitality, leisure, personal care, gym and accommodation businesses, which will be more severely impacted by restrictions when they re-open, and up to £6,000 for non-essential retail, which can open at Step 2 of the roadmap. The guidance lists village halls & scout huts, clubs and institutions, pavilions, and cadet huts etc. as eligible, but only if they are already on the local authority's rating valuation list so once again church halls and other halls which are not on the rating list at their local authority will not be eligible and will have to apply for the discretionary Restart grant instead.

Following the Covid 19 bulletin sent out by DCT in March summarising the Government guidance there were immediately several queries from community hall committees about how they find out whether they are on the rating valuation list and, if not, how to apply for a discretionary grant.

DCT reported that, in January and February, the number of queries to the DCT Helpline in respect of vaccinations and testing locations had reduced. The reduction continued through March as more information came out from Devon County Council regarding testing and vaccinations which DCT quickly relayed out to rural communities via our social media and bulletins. The breakdown of Helpline queries and information/advice given is detailed later in this report.

The sampling survey of mutual aid groups in rural Devon that DCT carried out in February gave useful information about rural community volunteering activities and challenges during the lockdown periods over the last year. We have taken the opportunity in March to further reflect on the data and the themes that have arisen as a result of the research. These are identified in section 4 of this report.

We were invited to give a key note presentation at a National Association of Local Councils (NALC) national online event "Building Back Resilient Communities" in March, describing Devon's approach to supporting rural communities during the pandemic and sharing our learning for the future.

Our engagement with Devon's strategic partnerships working to support the Covid 19 recovery process has continued, including:

- Devon Local Outbreak Engagement Board – attended March meeting, giving information about the range of activities of the mutual aid groups – Cllr Hart as Chair extended thanks to all the volunteers involved in the mutual aid groups, which DCT sent out in summary of meeting notes as e-bulletin
- Team Devon Recovery Co-ordination Group (DRCG)
- DRCG sub groups including VCSE Recovery (co-Chairing fortnightly meetings); Data and Impact Assessment; Employability, Skills and Business
- Meetings with the NHS Devon re Rural Health Inequalities
- Heart of the South West Skills Advisory Panel Board meeting

- Heart of the South West Rural Productivity Group consultation response
- Local Resilience Forum (Vaccination) Volunteer Cell meetings
- Exploratory meeting re potential for online volunteer passport system for Devon

We have also contributed to national intelligence gathering to inform the recovery process, through providing fortnightly intelligence reports as a registered Devon Local Infrastructure Organisation (LIO) for the NAVCA National VCSE Emergency Partnership.

2.0 Covid-19 Local Outbreak and Recovery Helpline Activities

2.1 Group Type

There was a **total number of 81 helpline contacts** in March mostly from community buildings and local councils, with others from community organisations, and individuals. The majority were contacts from village halls and parish councils spread across the county.

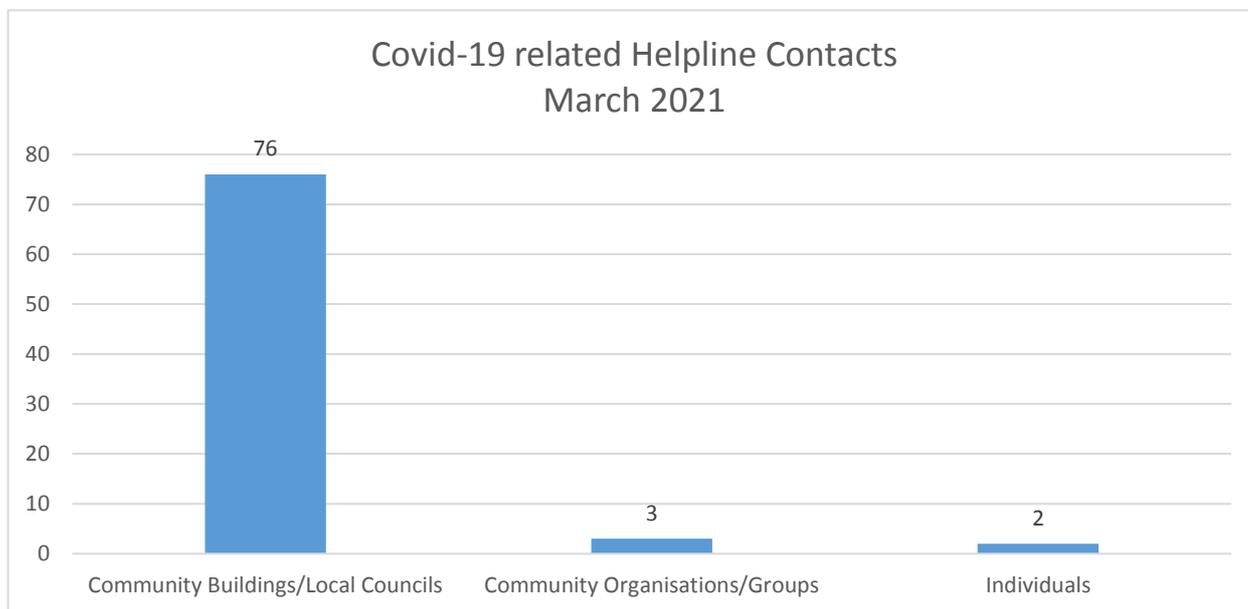


Figure 1: Bar chart illustrating total number of helpline contacts for March 2021.

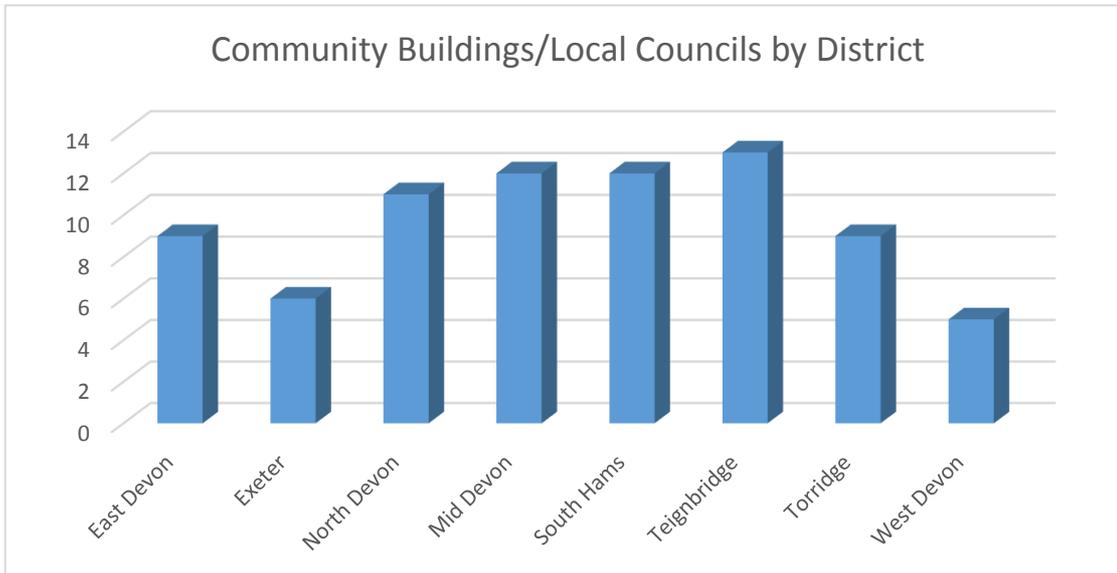


Figure 2: Bar chart illustrating contacts from community buildings and local councils in March 2021 by District area

2.2 Key Issues Identified March 2021

The majority of key issues identified on the helpline for March were on Organisation and Management, Finance, and Health & Social Care. Table 1 below provides further details on this.

KEY ISSUES			
General Category	Frequency	Specific Issues	Details and Support Provided
Organisation and Management	71	Management of operations and community buildings, community organisations, and community groups.	<p>The majority of enquiries were centred on village halls, community buildings, local community businesses and organisations seeking further clarification on national guidelines for the dates on the roadmap to unlocking and permitted activities.</p> <p>10 requests related specifically to wording re Covid 19 on community building hire agreements.</p> <p>.</p>

			<p>A small number of queries related to the requirements re COVID 19 and the use of halls as polling stations or in holding the Parish AGM.</p> <p>As vaccination progressed in Devon through March, there were queries about proof of vaccination for visitors to halls, ventilation of the hall during bookings, risk assessments for Covid 19 and other issues re best practice on unlocking in May and other queries re event compliance – in buildings and in public outdoor areas e.g. playing fields.</p> <p>We advised one village hall committee which was under pressure from a user group to provide expensive air scrubbers that this was not best use of funds since the information we have received is that the beneficial effect over ventilation by windows is marginal.</p> <p>DCT helpline staff provided assistance to all contacts. This included dissemination of key information such as the ACRE guidance for Village halls, since this often provides clarity on guidelines specifically for village halls and community buildings.</p>
Finance	7	Financial Support	<p>The majority of queries related to eligibility for Restart or ARG grant as well as help in interpreting and filling in the grant application forms. Although there are only 7 contacts logged, the time taken to support groups through the maze of Covid 19 recovery or compensation grants this month was considerable.</p> <p>One query related to holding and passing on funds to a community food project. Advised that groups need to have their own constitution and bank account, rather than another community organisation holding funds for them.</p> <p>All contacts with this concern were provided with information and referred to their respective District councils for further support.</p>

Health and Social Care	3	Access to Health Care	<p>One query was asking to be signposted to get testing kits; 2 other queries related specifically to finding support for 'at risk' individuals.</p> <p>All enquirers were signposted to the relevant sources of advice and information.</p>
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Table 1: Table showing and providing details on specific issues identified in March 21

3.0 Covid 19-related detail from DCT Helpline calls

3.1 Detail from DCT Helpline contacts

A considerable amount of time has been spent this month in discussing with groups the application of Covid 19 rules in parishes, public spaces and community halls. Examples are:

- Parish requesting arbitration between two opposing interpretations of Covid 19 rules for public space
- Village hall under pressure from a user group to spend their compensation grant monies putting in air scrubbers. Advised this would not be an appropriate use of funds and that the impact of such a system over ventilation through windows this summer would be marginal.
- Advised one village hall that the hall could be used to test equipment
- Advised all halls that, regretfully, halls cannot be used at the moment for birthday parties or other celebrations.
- We helped several halls get ready for local elections in May re Covid 19 safety and regulations.
- In two parishes we gave advice about support for a vulnerable parishioner.
- In one parish we were asked to help contact a client by a care company. We were then in discussions with Devon County Council Social Services over the vulnerability of at that client and advised a family member over care needs.

4.0 Research carried out in February 21 re Community Mutual Aid Groups Implications/ reflections on findings:

4.1 Research Cohort

DCT contacted 26 groups that were community-contact-led and held a purposeful conversation with 16 of these. In addition, we held a longer conversation with two of the groups as representative of the ways in which at least 2 groups have adapted to changing circumstances.

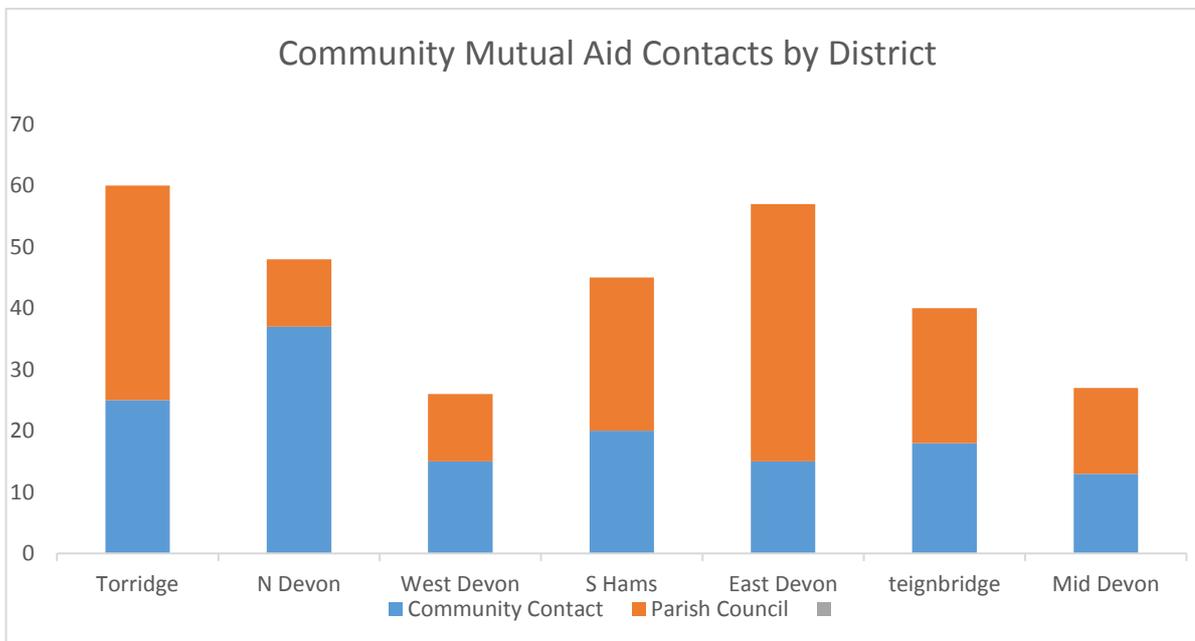


Fig 3: Stacked bar chart showing proportion of parish and community contacts by District Council area

4.2 Reflections on Findings from Community Mutual Aid Groups Research

4.2.1 Do Community Mutual Aid Groups need/want to be organised?

The District based online fora of town, parish and community groups that DCT arranged with District Councils in November 20 – Jan 21 emphasised that community mutual aid groups did not want or need organising with constitutions and committee structures.

The primary research carried out by DCT in February 21 confirmed this. Groups had come together in response to need and opportunity. The need was to help those who were shielding. This need was clear, obvious and attractive to potential volunteers. The opportunity was that so many people had been furloughed or locked down where the only respite allowed by Covid 19 regulations was a daily walk outside or to take part in volunteering activities.

Groups used local knowledge and ingenuity to set up recording systems for the need and their local offer. And these were set up locally very quickly, even before the District or County authorities had set up support or referral systems. The leadership shown by parish and town councillors as individual contacts or co-ordinators was particularly evident in the analysis of the 303 mutual aid contacts on the District Councils' websites. Two thirds of contacts were named parish or town councillors.

As was shown in the case studies in our January/February 21 Covid 19 report, there are some parishes where what started as an informal response to need by a community mutual aid group has turned into a more formal structure – either a social enterprise (e.g. Bradninch Catch 77) or a community planning forum (Braunton). There are also a number of food distribution groups, food banks and community pantries that sprung up during lockdowns and where the individuals involved have seen an opportunity to turn a volunteering activity into a social enterprise.

From DCT’s discussions with leaders in these 2 case studies, the pandemic lockdown and the community support activities had given them a chance to re-evaluate the social value of the activities and to think about creating a more long term social enterprise.

As the groups have developed, the individuals involved have become more conscious of the need for compliance e.g. with health and safety regs, DBS or food hygiene requirements. A number of groups have approached DCT since January 2021 for support in writing a constitution, forming a legal organisational structure for a social enterprise or for fundraising and business development advice.

4.2.2 Volunteer Training

During the online fora discussions during November 2020 to January 2021, towns, parishes and groups discussed the concerns that volunteers had voiced about the level of mental stress that volunteers were picking up from ‘clients’ during requests for help, befriending calls or on the doorstep when delivering shopping or medicines. Some co-ordinators of mutual aid groups felt that it would have been useful to have had some basic ‘light-touch’ training in co-ordinating volunteers etc. More groups, particularly in East Devon but also in other areas, felt that some training in interacting with people with dementia or mental stress would have been useful.

Two key issues that have been revealed for rural areas in supporting people in their own homes over the long periods of lockdown of the pandemic are:

- The reliance on digital platforms for co-ordinating the volunteer tasks – e.g. what’s app. Where volunteers were not connected to these digital platforms they lost out on volunteer ‘offers’
- Those older people whom rural areas have traditionally relied upon on for volunteering e.g. village hall committees, were not available as they were shielding.

Covid 19 has shown us all, therefore, that both enabling rural people to be able to connect digitally – improving the digital infrastructure - and training particularly for older people in digital skills are vital to enable rural communities to be resilient to withstand crises.

4.2.3 A new Age of Volunteering?

The ‘Gig Economy’, where more workers are selling their labour on a task-by-task basis rather than in traditional 9 -5 employment is growing. The trend towards this way of working has developed over the last ten years. But the Covid -19 crisis has seen many people taking on this form of work – often carried out or co-ordinated remotely – of necessity due to redundancy or loss of business.

This type of working lends itself particularly to the new millennial age of volunteering, letting people donate whatever time they have available on a task by task basis. And doing this remotely or locally. Types of volunteering tasks that would fit this brief and would be attractive to millennials are:

- Local emergency response
- Litter-picking
- Delivering a newsletter
- Baking cakes for a local event
- Helping organise the event on the day
- Designing a leaflet
- Being part of a focus group
- Sending out press releases or social media to publicise activities.

Of course there will still be a need for people to be involved as committee members and trustees of local, regional and national organisations as the infrastructure of driving forward a robust voluntary, community and enterprise sector. But the findings from even this sampling of the activities and aspirations of small local groups has highlighted the need and opportunity to develop systems and structures and training to support this newer style of volunteering, remote-based, digitally-organised and recruiting volunteers task by task.

5.0 Website and Social Media Communications – March 2021

5.1 Call to Action to recruit volunteers to help their local school with Covid 19 testing of schoolchildren

In addition to the e-bulletin that went out as a call to action to recruit volunteers to help with Covid 19 testing of schoolchildren in their school, DCT put out posts through social media, with reach of 4991 individual contacts.

5.2 Revisions to DCT Website Pages

The DCT marketing and project teams have created and/or revised four website pages within the Covid-19 information page and subpages. These revisions include the following pages:

- <https://www.devoncommunities.org.uk/information-and-advice-about-funding> (see below)
- <https://www.devoncommunities.org.uk/advice-southwest-businesses-around-covid-19>
- <https://www.devoncommunities.org.uk/second-lockdown-community-buildings>
- <https://www.devoncommunities.org.uk/coronavirus-information>

INFORMATION AND ADVICE ABOUT FUNDING

View Edit Delete Revisions Clone

FUNDING AVAILABLE: 'LOCKDOWN 2'

The job retention scheme (furlough) has been extended until March. If you need to claim wages for employees on furlough due to the pandemic please go to - <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/claim-for-wages-through-the-coronavirus-job-retention-scheme>

Devon Businesses may be eligible for support through the local restrictions support grant, this is administered by the district council. In addition to the grant you may be eligible for a bounce back loan, small businesses fund, the community business renewal fund, or other specific funding. Details of the above and more can all be accessed at the DCC funding support page here.

OTHER RESOURCES

GOV.UK are offering funding and financial guidance for those who are self-employed and for small, medium and large businesses. Through this page, you can access business support grant funds, applications to schemes and much more!

Figure 2: Screenshot of CV-19 Funding subpage

5.3 Website Page Views – Google Analytics

During March 2021, the DCT website pages received the following number of total views:

- Welcome/home page (which features 4 links to the coronavirus information page and helpline information): **1,938 views**
- Coronavirus information page (which features helpline information and 19 subpages): **286 views, which was the fifth most viewed page in the site**
- The news item about volunteering to deliver CV19 testing in schools was **the third most visited page on the whole site with 855 views.**
- **Listening Ear project** (supporting businesses during CV19): **893 views**
- Re-opening Village Halls guidance: **115 views**
- Devon Community Resilience Forum project page: **114 views**
- Small registered charity grants information: **57 views**
- Advice for Community Buildings: **61 views**
- The Devon Community Resilience Forum resources page: **54 views**

Of the above pages, the page with the highest viewing time over the last month was 'Listening Ear' project. This received a viewing time of **7 minutes and 46 seconds.**

5.4 E-bulletins

During March 21, a total number of **4 e-bulletins** featuring covid-19 resources, advice and updates have been sent to our Village Halls, Community Buildings and Town & Parish council contacts, as well as our social enterprise contacts where appropriate. Examples of content include:

Your school needs Volunteers – 1 March

This bulletin featured information regarding the recruitment of volunteers to help with Covid 19 testing in schools

Covid 19 Testing Services and Locations 4 March

This bulletin contained information on Covid 19 testing sites and how to encourage vaccine - hesitant people to take the jab. It also gave an invitation to employers to join a D T Focus Group to test the Explore tool to help young people who are looking for working but are facing challenging personal circumstances.

Census 2021 – 10 March

This bulletin featured information about the 2021 Census household access codes and where to get support to fill in the census or to get a paper copy

5.5 Social Media Activity Table

In March, we have posted content about our information page, helpline, resources and events across our three main social media channels. (Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn), as well as Instagram.

Example content from each network:



Facebook post: 1 March

Twitter post: 15 March

LinkedIn post: 25 March

Below is a table of engagements for all related social media content in March 2021



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01/03/21	Twitter, Facebook linkedIN	<p>📣 Your school needs testing volunteers! Live in #Braunton #Chulmleigh #Cullompton #Dawlish #Exeter #Exmouth #GreatTorrington #NewtonAbbot #Crediton #Sidmouth #SouthMolton #Teignmouth #Ilfracombe #Tiverton #Uffculme? Help #Devon's children return to school</p> <p>https://buff.ly/3q2iqA3 pic.twitter.com/IYWJENL1fE</p>	<p>Reach (fb): 4991 Impressions (t/Li): 612 Retweets: 1 Likes: 5 Shares: 29 Clicks: 60</p>
09/03/21	Twitter, Facebook linkedIN	<p>The #roadmap may have begun with many schools re-opening to more students this week but there are many more changes and adjustments to come over the coming weeks and months. Our helpline is still here to support communities manage these changes. Call us if you need to. #covid19uk pic.twitter.com/xqq9y37gsP</p>	<p>Reach (fb): 251 Impressions (t/Li): 893 Retweets: 3 Likes: 4 Shares: 1 Clicks: 3</p>
25/03/21	Twitter, Facebook linkedIN	<p>COVID-19 brings a lot of uncertainties to us all, that why we have a COVID-19 helpline to help anyone we can. If you have a COVID-19 related question or need assistance you can always contact us. Click the link below to find out more:</p>	<p>Reach (fb): 110 Impressions (t/Li): 173 Retweets: 0 Likes: 4 Shares: 3 Clicks: 2</p>