

Impact Report

2020 - 2021



WOKINGHAM
UNITED CHARITIES

Supporting people in need in
Wokingham since 1451

Charity No. 1107171



WOKINGHAM UNITED CHARITIES

Our Vision

Wokingham United Charities envisions a community where those facing hardship are not only supported, but empowered to lift themselves out of poverty to break the cycle, creating a healthy, stable environment for themselves, their family and the community.

Our Mission

Wokingham United Charities mission is to relieve poverty and enhance the quality of life of older people, children, adults and young adults in need in our community.

Our Values

Community

Passionate about our diverse community, which drives us to find innovative ways to help tackle community issues

Opportunities

Proactively seeking opportunities to not only better ourselves as a charity, but finding ways we can present opportunities to our beneficiaries to enhance their life

Respect

Treating all we encounter with care and valuing each individual's perspective

Integrity

Building trust through open communication, sincerity and mutual respect, holding a high ethical and professional standard

About Us

Our origins can be dated all the way back to 1451, when John Westende gifted eight cottages to the poor and needy people in Wokingham. Wokingham United Charities is an amalgamation of some 21 local charities, some of which date back to being the oldest charities in England. In the present day, we still provide accommodation to those in need with our Almshouses and also manage a substantial Relief in Need fund which provides grant funding for both individuals, and local charities and organisations within the Borough of Wokingham.

Aims & Objectives

The charity's objectives are the relief of poverty, hardship, or distress of people resident in Wokingham Borough. Our work ranges from the provision of supported accommodation to the distribution of grant funding to help people in need. We have two separate but linked roles:

1. operating a sizeable Relief in Need endowed fund to assist Wokingham Borough residents who are in poverty, hardship, or distress
2. Running the Wokingham Almshouses at Westende

We strive to achieve this through the activities of the two funds the charity holds:

Almshouse Fund

The income of the almshouse fund is applied to maintain and improve the charity's almshouse at "Westende" and to benefit the residents' use and enjoyment of the property. Within this fund there are two designated funds — the cyclical maintenance fund (for regular repairs and maintenance) and the extraordinary repair fund (for major "one-off" repairs and improvements).

Relief in Need Fund

The charity has two main grant programmes for the benefit of the residents of the Borough of Wokingham. The Essential Item grant programme is for individuals and families living in crisis or hardship. We provide essential items, including household goods, laptops, and medical equipment (not available on the NHS) to help vulnerable and in-need adults, families, and children. The Relief in Need grant programme provides grants to local charities and organisations providing services in our area of benefit. Both these programmes provide targeted grants to help those who need it most.

The Covid-19 Pandemic

The Board's initial focus had been to continue with the growth of the Relief in Need grant programme that had started so well the previous year. However, with the interruption of the pandemic, priorities had to be re-evaluated. The focus turned to how best to provide support to individuals and charities during the pandemic. Covid-19 necessitated members of staff working from home from 23rd March 2020 and a move to virtual meetings for the Board and committees. The pandemic saw a dramatic increase in demand for our Essential Item grants. We swiftly adapted processes and procedures to accommodate staff and partner organisations working from home. Acting quickly ensured as little disruption to our services as possible.

When the first lockdown was imposed, the board took a cautious and considered approach to grant funding. The charity's usual Relief in Need grant programmes were postponed, and the Essential Item grant programme increased exponentially, so it was decided to reallocate funds to cover this increase. As the pandemic continued, the trustees utilised funds and provided emergency grants to those charities providing frontline services. Introducing emergency grants of up to £2,000 for charities still operating and providing essential services during the lockdown, including the Foodbank and Berkshire Lowland Search and Rescue, provided much needed funding when other funding streams ceased. With the introduction of the One Front Door project, driven by Citizens Advice Wokingham, local charities were brought together. As our Essential Item grants continued to increase in demand, the trustees, together with the staff, re-assessed the best way to provide this service. The Board chose to partner with Citizens Advice Wokingham, who provide an assessment and benefit check to their clients. This involved Citizens Advice Wokingham taking on the application process for the Essential Item grant programme, and another local charity, The Cowshed, would help with fulfilling the grant requests.

We were fortunate that a member of staff lives on site, so we were still able to support our Almshouse residents, many of whom were shielding. The local council were supportive in providing appropriate PPE. We implemented Covid-19 safety measures in all communal areas and were delighted that the Almshouse residents remained Covid-free throughout the year and, when restrictions allowed, were able to enjoy getting together outside for a socially distanced get-together in our communal courtyard.

2020/2021 was a challenging year for Wokingham United Charities as a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic, as it was for all. We have been amazed by the determination and resilience shown by local charities and organisations in the Borough of Wokingham, and how coming together and working in partnership provided much needed support to Wokingham Borough residents in a time of need.

How we helped through the Covid-19 Pandemic

Providing material for scrubs

Supporting care leavers

Awarding grants to local charities to enable them to continue with online support

Supporting students with home-schooling, providing equipment including laptops and tablets

Providing emergency grants for local charities leading frontline services

Allowing more flexibility within our grant guidelines for those charities who received a grant prior to Covid-19

Working with other grant givers on match funding for projects

Providing grant funding for core costs to allow charities to start planning for the future

Helping families with grants for washing machines, fridge-freezers and cookers

Adapted our procedures to delivery Essential Item grants as our professional referrers began to work from home without access to finances to action the grant

Kind Words

“On behalf of The Foodbank, please accept our most sincere thanks for this emergency grant. Not only will it provide food to vulnerable people in our community, but it will provide a major morale boost to all our volunteer workers.”

Trustee, Wokingham Foodbank

“This is the first time I have used WUC and I am very impressed at the service provided. Every contact I have made has been responded to quickly and efficiently and the contact has been consistent and helpful throughout. It is wonderful to know that charities are committed to the cause and can make such a difference for families facing hardship, especially as we are facing so many uncertain times due to the current pandemic. Thank you on behalf of the family.”

Wokingham Children’s Services.

A message from our Chair of Trustees...

"A year like no other! April 2020 and within two weeks, we were in the throes of a national lockdown caused by Covid-19, the worst pandemic in 200 years.

Our staff worked from home for the rest of the year, so telephone systems, IT and banking arrangements suddenly came to the fore. Zoom became the new communication forum, which I have to say, worked very well and still does.

Having said all that, our daily tasks continued, and committees still met via Zoom, of course, on a regular basis.

The trustees passed a resolution to increase our area of benefit to encompass the whole of the Wokingham Borough Council area and received the approval of the Charities Commission. The original area of benefit had been restricted by historic ancient parish boundaries, so this was a great achievement, enabling us to provide relief to those in need across a much greater area.

Our grants programme had ended in the previous financial year with the successful Strictly Charity event, where we donated £120,000 to 12 local charities. The trustees decided early on to postpone similar organisational programmes as they believed that Essential Item grants would boom because of the extreme situation.

Our Almshouses continued to be maintained and updated regularly, especially with the renovation of the heating and water systems. None of our residents caught the virus, and they were all included in the first stages of vaccination toward the end of the year. The trustees were pleased that our Covid-19 procedures were effective in this regard.

Trustees continued to help in every way, but we were sad to lose both our vice chair, Rod Sears and our finance chair, John Ellis. In addition, Peter Lucey, the town council representative, stood down. However, we still have a group of trustees with a broad spectrum of experience, and two new trustees joined us following a period of serving on our committees. Simon Price, an officer of Wokingham Borough Council, and Jake Morrison, who is Chief Executive Officer of the local Citizens Advice Wokingham. In addition, we welcomed two parish councillors from the expanded area of benefit, Elizabeth Rowland, from Woodley Parish Council, and Jane Hartley, from Charvil Parish Council, as advisers to our grants committee and Darrell Hutton who brings a wealth of experience to the Westende Committee.

Particular thanks to Jane Holloway, my Vice Chair and Chair of the grants committee, Anne King, Chair of the Westende committee, and Graeme Hobbs, who has become Honorary Treasurer following the departure of John Ellis. Dennis Eyriey, past chair, has continued to use his vast legal skills for the benefit of ensuring the trust stays within the Charity Commission guidelines.

Our staff continued to serve the charity wonderfully. Tracey Hedgecox, Operations Manager, led the team into unknown territory and grappled with constant change. Lynda Rowe who has been the warden for over 20 years, remained on site helping to keep our residents safe and providing additional support during the lockdown. The third member of the team, Amy Garstang, concentrated mainly on the Essential Item grants programme and developed the relationship with Citizens Advice Wokingham when they introduced their One Front Door initiative with Wokingham Borough Council.

As I said, a year like no other and hopefully not to be repeated.”

Mark Hall

Chair of trustees



Jake Morrison, Simon Price, David Auger, Mark Hall Chair, Janet Rogers, Dr Ian Hossack, Jane Holloway Grants Chair, Dennis Eyriey, Anne King Westende Chair, Gordon Veitch, Graeme Hobbs Honorary Treasurer not pictured

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all of our trustees and committee members for their time. We are very fortunate to have a Board of Trustees who are passionate about Wokingham United Charities and its objectives. They share a great deal of knowledge and experience.

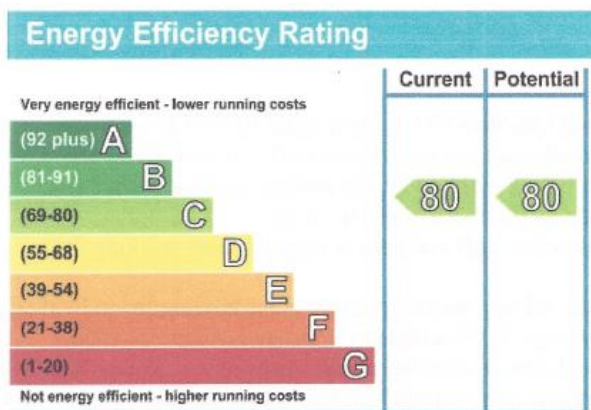
Westende Almshouses

The single storey Almshouses originated as a gift from John Westende in 1451. The adjacent Queen Victoria Almshouses were built in 1887. All were demolished in 1974 and replaced by the Westende House and Queen Victoria House flats. The Almshouses were then renovated in 1987. The Almshouses consist of 27 modern, individual, and well-appointed flats, each with a spacious living room, a double bedroom, a modern fitted kitchen, and a bathroom with a walk-in shower; there is generous storage space, and each flat has its own front door. The Almshouses are semi-sheltered accommodation for older people and have a resident manager on site. Residents are charged a maintenance contribution for their flats, which is significantly cheaper than the market price for similar accommodation in the Wokingham area.

To qualify to become a resident, a person must:

- be unable to afford to buy or rent an equivalent sized dwelling in the area
- be able to live independently (which means they do not need help in the flat and can shop and cook for themselves).
- be in a financial or other significant need
- have a strong connection with Wokingham, ideally by having lived there themselves or have other connections
- be of retirement age or close to it
- understand that they are moving to a group of flats with a community ethos
- have no current accommodation or be in unsuitable accommodation

Three flats were fully refurbished during the year. One flat underwent redecoration as a result of an underground pipe leak. Moving forward, all flats will have the pipework reinstated above ground to avoid a repeat of the hidden leak and associated damp issues. Demand for individual grants and accommodation has increased dramatically. Whilst WUC had no vacant flats, they were able to offer support to those at risk of eviction by signposting to other almshouse accommodation and referrals to other charitable and support services in the Borough.



All flats had an Energy Performance Certificate check and were rated C.

A new staff toilet was installed opposite the new office, as previously staff had to go out to another block to use the facilities.

The charity commissioned a major upgrade of the central heating and hot water systems in order to update the ageing plant, improve the water pressure to all flats and reduce the risk of leaks from the tanks in the loft. The project was massively delayed at the beginning because of misunderstandings over the new water supply, which had to be procured from the utility, and then the pandemic. Eventually, in March 2021, the heating boilers were commissioned, and the new water heaters were installed in September 2021.

Due to the restrictions, all social events at Westende were cancelled. This included the weekly coffee mornings and activity afternoons. The annual Christmas Dinner and Strawberry Tea were postponed due to the Covid-19 restrictions. However, we were able to provide our residents with individual Christmas Tea boxes in the lead up to Christmas. These were well received. The Christmas tea boxes contained sandwiches, scones with jam and cream, and a selection of Christmas sweet treats.



Westende Almshouse in the 1950's
Wokingham A Pictorial History by J. and R. Lea



Westende Almshouse London Road 2021



Westende Almshouse Courtyard 2021



Westende Almshouse London Road 2021

What our residents think of Westende

"We, my husband and I, moved into Westende in May 2021, part way through the pandemic when we were allowed to move house again. We'd waited so long, we were grateful to be able to finally move in.

I was born in Wokingham and grew up here. My dad and brother used to do the plumbing and kitchen fitting at Westende many years ago, and I remember walking past Westende thinking I'd love to live there. The flats always looked lovely and well-kept.

We moved to Southsea as we wanted to live by the sea when we retired but still had family in Wokingham. Not long after we moved, my husband had a stroke, which left him with health and mobility issues. Being so far from family when we needed their support was tough. I started to think about moving back and thought I'd have to wait for council accommodation to become available, but then an old friend from Wokingham suggested I enquire at Westende. I thought they were privately owned and just didn't think we'd have a chance to get a flat or even be able to afford one! We were lucky that a flat became available and we were next to be considered. It was meant to be. We could come back to Wokingham to be near family.

Living at Westende is great, it's a nice place, Lynda is on hand, and so is ForestCare, which is reassuring. There's a lovely social environment. Where we used to live, the neighbours weren't interested. Here, there's always someone to talk to, you see people around, even to just say hello. It's a friendly community and we feel safe here, and any problems are soon sorted."

Carol & Kevin, Westende Residents



"I'm happy here and I want people to know I'm happy here. I've lived here 22 years now, and they've been good years. Through all the pandemic, not one of us caught it. I missed seeing the trustees pop in, but locking us down worked, and Lynda was about to help.

My husband, Tommy, and I moved here from Sturges Road. We have lived in Wokingham since we moved from Ireland. Tommy's work brought us here. He had no qualifications, had left school at 14, but was working to get a diploma at 39 years old. He qualified as a youth worker and had three places to choose from, and he chose Wokingham, and it became home. We lived on Sturges Road for many years before coming to Westende. It was the best thing to move to Wokingham. Tommy used to play Father Christmas every year for our church, The Salvation Army, and for our daughter Janet's school. We loved being part of the community.

We put our name down for a flat. I was waiting for an operation on my knee, wasn't ideal, but we got offered a flat and it was all at the right time. With operations on both knees and hips, I retired from working nights at the masonic care home but got bored quickly, so I went to Murdoch House as the activity's organiser, which was great and I stayed for 8 years! We used to have afternoon tea every afternoon at 3 pm. I used to make it back



by 4 pm just in time for the second cup. It's been quiet through the pandemic and we've missed socialising, but now we're able to get together again, it's lovely to have the coffee mornings Lynda puts on.

My flat is ideal; I can see who walks past and get to talk to people at the window. My family are pleased and thankful that I'm here. They worry less and having Lynda and ForestCare gives them peace of mind. "

Molly, Westende Resident

"It has been a strange year with an uncomfortable feeling of remoteness. Until the pandemic hit, committee members had met regularly with some of the residents and occasionally with all of them. This pastoral care is an important element of our role and we are looking forward to being able to make contact more often. We soon got used to holding our meetings on zoom, and cut out the travelling – even just round Wokingham. It was good, part way through the year, to welcome Darrell Hutton as a new member of the committee: Westende will benefit hugely from his knowledge of buildings and particularly their services."

Anne King, Chair of Westende Committee

Achievements at a glance

The charity's total grants for the year were **£185,681** (2020 £272,569), of which **£77,167** benefited **321** individuals (2020 39 individual grants totalling £14,591). There were also Relief in Need organisations' grants of **£108,514** that benefitted **24** organisations.

In the **first 8 weeks** of this financial year, we **awarded over £100,000 in grants!**

5 debt relief order grant awards, (total cost of £450), allowed one professional referrer to **discharge over £50,000 in debt**

Awarded a **total of £35,000** to local charities under our **emergency grant programme**

We awarded over **£70,000** through our Essential Item grant programme which **benefitted 250** individuals

We awarded **nearly £50,000** from our Relief in Need fund to local charities

There was a huge **increase in Essential Item grant applications** and we awarded **318% more** than the previous year

Relief in Need Grants

Young People with Dementia were awarded £10,000 to adapt their service to provide support for their clients during lockdown online and via the telephone. As restrictions were lifted, micro groups and one-on-one sessions were incorporated. This grant benefited 70 people directly and provided respite for their family members.



£10,000



£20,000

Berkshire Women's Aid received £20,000, which was match funded by the Berkshire Community Foundation. There was a 9% increase in cases of domestic violence during Covid-19. The £40,000 total grant funded the re-opening of a refuge for one year that had previously been closed due to a lack of funding.

The Cowshed received £10,000 towards core costs. This included a contribution towards the salary of a referrals coordinator and funding for items that cannot be donated, such as underwear and duvets.



THE COWSHED

£10,000



£12,892.36

Citizens Advice Wokingham were successful in obtaining continuation funding for their Advice at Home project. This built on lessons learnt from the previous community outreach programme and aimed to reach those clients who may not be able to access the traditional service and who may have multiple issues and need additional support.

ADVICE AT HOME CASE STUDY Father initially requested help with alternative housing for three children living with mother and new partner following them witnessing physical and emotional abuse.

The Advice at Home project:

- Recognised the clients extremely low mood at the end of his relationship and after experiencing domestic violence
- Encouraged the client to discuss his anxiety about being a “good enough sole parent”
- Encouraged the client to consider his own mental health and seek ad hoc counselling
- Helped the client apply and receive universal credit, council tax reduction, child benefit and discretionary housing payment

Berkshire Vision's project was to provide activities for those with sight loss (which is rapidly rising and anticipated to double in Wokingham by 2030-RNIB) to prevent and relieve social isolation, a main issue identified by those living with sight loss. The activities, curling, acoustic shooting, seated exercise, tandem cycling, swimming, theatre trips included assistance with transport. The project will bring people together, improving social isolation, increase confidence and improve mental and physical health.



£8,690



£5,000

Camp Mohawk were awarded a grant for core costs to support salaries in running their multi-functional site for children with special needs and their families. Located just outside our area of benefit in Wargrave, 32% of their service users reside in our area of benefit; 162 families currently attend. They run four separate projects: family support, short-breaks scheme, shared play scheme, and open sessions.

Life Education: Harold and the Life Bus' project will deliver health, wellbeing, and drug prevention education workshops in schools. Life Education also provides staff training and parents and carers' workshops. 'Harold' the famous giraffe puppet, helps to explore children's attitudes and dilemmas, covering a variety of topics, building confidence and self-esteem, resilience to risk, tackling peer group pressure, and bullying.



Life Education
Wessex & Thames Valley

£1,890



£1,500

Berkshire Lowland Search is a 100% volunteer-run search and rescue team, receiving no government funding. They are heavily used by the police for missing person searches and saw a huge increase in demand during the lockdown. BLSR received an emergency grant to cover the cost of 6 months' rent as this cost is usually covered by fundraising activities which were cancelled due to Covid-19 restrictions.

Wokingham Foodbank received an emergency grant to purchase food items to enable the foodbank to continue running during the COVID-19 crisis, by providing food items to the vulnerable residents in the community. Usually, the generosity of local people's donations would sustain the giving, but due to a 300% increase in demand and lockdown restrictions, donations were significantly reduced, leaving the foodbank short of essentials.



£1,890

Essential Item Grants

In previous years, Individual grants as they were known, have predominantly been for household items such as cookers, fridges, washing machines, beds etc. In 2020/2021, we renamed this programme the "Essential Item" grant programme. Whilst requests for these items continued, we found there were an array of what could be considered an essential item and grants were approved for, amongst others: laptops and Chromebooks for home schooling; debt associated fees such as debt relief orders and bankruptcy costs: a trampoline for a child whose mother had mobility issues and couldn't get out to take the child to the park during lockdown; dyslexia assessment; an electric scooter; and a stairlift hire to enable a terminally ill person to remain living at home. Wherever possible, we work with other local funders for medical equipment requests that are not funded or fully funded by the NHS. We were able to jointly fund a bespoke electric wheelchair costing over £5,000 by working with Reading Dispensary Trust and Berkshire Nurses, as well as using the NHS contribution of £1,200.

With the success of the One Front Door project, helping more people than ever, the Board wanted to make sure that our grants were easily accessible when needed. With this in mind, we partnered with Citizens Advice Wokingham in November 2020. This provided a more streamlined and holistic support package for Wokingham Borough residents in need. Citizens Advice Wokingham carries out a comprehensive review, including budgeting advice, help with claiming benefits, and referring to other services in the borough. If an essential item is required that cannot be funded elsewhere, they complete the application form. We initially had additional support from The Cowshed, who helped to fulfil the grant requests, and this joint work was a positive initiative.

CASE STUDY

After a referral from a Housing Support Officer, WUC funded household items for a client whose house had burnt down. Citizens Advice arranged welfare provision for other items that were needed, carried out a benefit check and again obtained a council tax reduction.

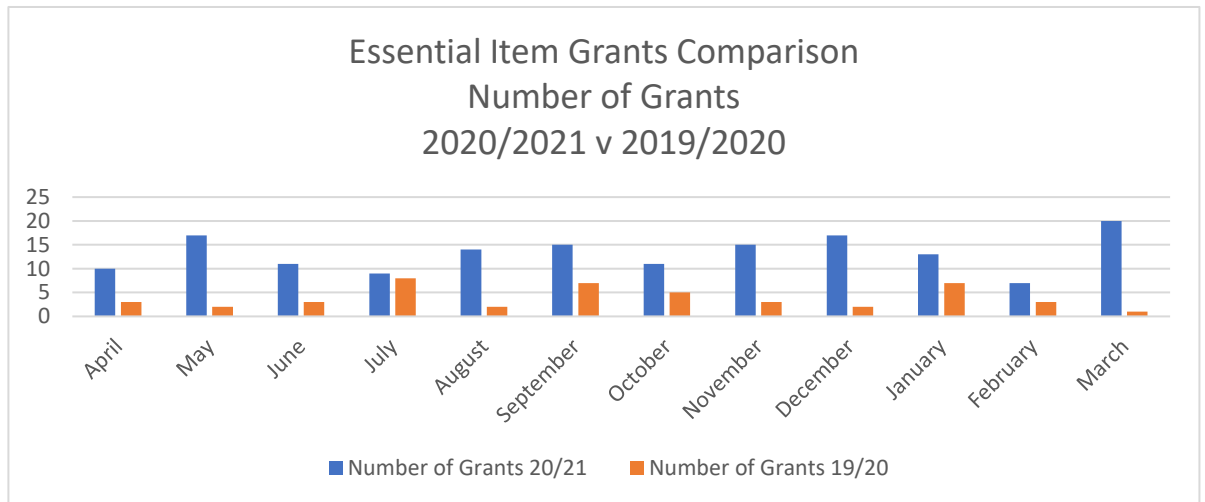
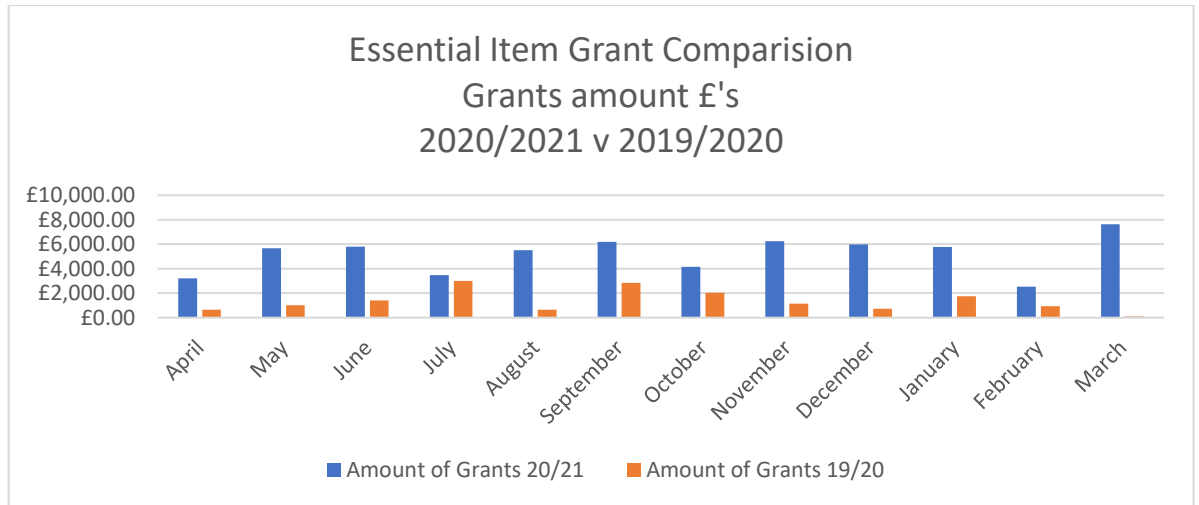
CASE STUDY

Following a referral from a social worker, WUC were able to fund car repairs for a client who was reliant on their car for getting her Special Education Needs child to school. Citizens Advice were able to provide assistance with benefits advice, a bedroom tax issue, council tax reduction and debts.

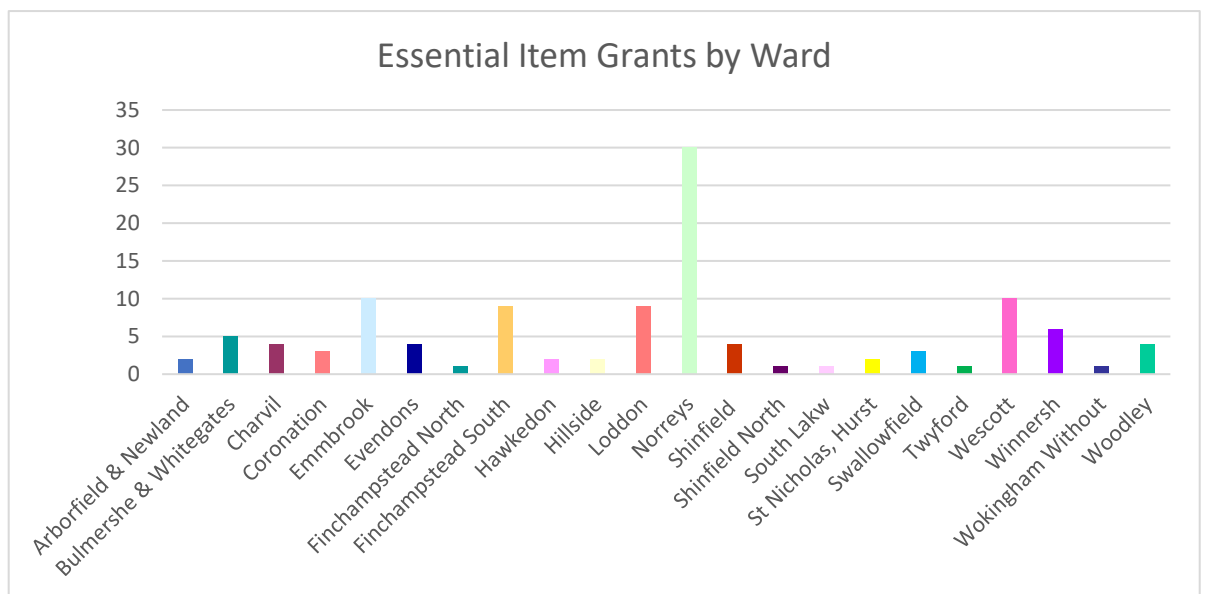
CASE STUDY

The client contacted CAW as her husband had been diagnosed with terminal cancer, the client had given up work to care for him. Now reliant on benefits and needed support to apply. CAW signposted to alternative support organisations, and CAW applied to WUC for a new bed as the client's husband was spending more and more time in bed, their current bed was old and uncomfortable and didn't meet his needs as his symptoms progressed.

Comparison of Essential Item Grants 2019/2020 – 2020/2021



Essential Item Grants by Ward 2020/2021



A message from our Grants Committee Chair...

The Covid-19 pandemic substantially changed the way the charity approached their grant programme. We had to be prepared to respond to the situation in a dynamic and proactive way to achieve our aim of providing relief to those in need.

Just as the pandemic began, our usual grant programme had closed and the grants committee was reviewing the applications. This was in the very early days when we expected the lockdown to only last a matter of weeks. We awarded £48,472.36 in grants during this grant round, ranging from £1,890 up to £12,892.36. As time went on and we were due to open a further grant round, restrictions were at their tightest and we were in a full lockdown. With so much uncertainty due to the pandemic, we decided to postpone this planned grant programme. We were mindful that our income from investments could be substantially affected by the financial markets and were cautious in our approach. However, we soon realised there was an immediate need to support local charities. We opened an emergency grant programme for Wokingham charities who were providing essential support to Wokingham residents during the lockdown. The emergency grants were specifically for Covid-19 related support, and we awarded £59,941.87.

Our Essential Item grants programme changed quite radically; our processes had to be revised to accommodate professional referrers working from home who were no longer able to access their organisations' financial systems. Our revised processes meant we could arrange the order and delivery direct to the client to ensure there was no delay in them receiving their essential item. Demand increased exponentially for Essential Item grants following the lockdown and due to the impact of furlough and redundancies across the borough. The types of essential items requested also varied from the typical white goods we had previously supplied to laptops and tablets to help families with home-schooling. We awarded just over £70,000 in Essential Item grants during 2020/2021, compared to nearer £15,000 during 2019/2020.

The grants team worked tirelessly via Zoom, so despite the limitations of home-working, we were still able to develop the relationship with our partners. This ultimately led to applications being completed by Citizens Advice Wokingham, also partnering with The Cowshed, who provided additional administrative support, which the charity financed. This joint working initiative allowed a more holistic approach, providing several support streams.

Despite these turbulent times, the charity continued to distribute valuable financial support to local charities and Wokingham Borough residents, and we look forward to this continuing. It is heart-warming to know that the work we do, truly makes a difference to people's lives. The feedback we receive shows us what a difference we can make.

Jane Holloway, Vice Chair and Chair of the Grants Committee

Our future

Following the Pandemic, the Board have taken time to reflect on the last eighteen months and to consider how we can now provide the best support to local charities and residents of Wokingham Borough. The Essential Item grant programme's budget was increased substantially due to the demand that only increased as we moved through the lockdowns. This demand is expected to continue in anticipation of the furlough scheme ending. The Board are also considering the best way to operate and distribute the Relief in Need fund as the Borough and charity organisations recover from the Pandemic. Working through the pandemic has had its positives, we hope that joint-working initiatives that have begun, continue and grow in strength.

The Trustees intend to continue to maintain and improve the facilities of the almshouse flats at Westende for the benefit of the residents. This includes electrical upgrades following the five-yearly electrical inspection. This work will be completed over the course of the next year. The Westende Committee commissioned a complete survey of the building in summer 2021 – a "quinquennial" report – and were relieved to find that there was no major work required that was not already in hand, but equally grateful for a lot of useful recommendations that will be followed up over the next five years.



WOKINGHAM UNITED CHARITIES



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