



**BABERGH AND MID SUFFOLK
DISTRICT COUNCILS**

WINTER WARMTH SUPPORT GRANT IMPACT REPORT

**NOVEMBER 2022 -
MARCH 2023**





INTRODUCTION

In the Autumn of 2022, Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils launched the Winter Warmth Support Grant. The grants were available to support small grass roots community groups and other not for profit organisations supporting residents across Babergh and Mid Suffolk with the cost-of-living crisis. The grants covered the period from November 2022 to 1st April 2023, enabling groups to deliver winter warmth activities in the late Autumn, Winter and early Spring months.

Eligible uses of the grant included the following: supporting organisations to keep their buildings open, and organisations to keep operating without passing on costs to residents, create a new warm space, combine a warm space with an existing activity to reduce the overall cost or to provide activities/entertainment.

This report was prepared using the information included in the monitoring feedback forms that were received by all applicant groups awarded Winter Warmth Funding. Out of the 56 groups we received 45 responses. We asked groups for information about attendee numbers, volunteer numbers and hours community venues were used per week. We also asked about the difference the Winter Warmth funding made to recipient organisations and to users of the groups.

IMPACT SNAPSHOT

56

VCFSE Groups supported

350

Volunteer opportunities created

2,700

Attendees

583.8

hours of Community Venues hire per week

**★
£91,518.41**

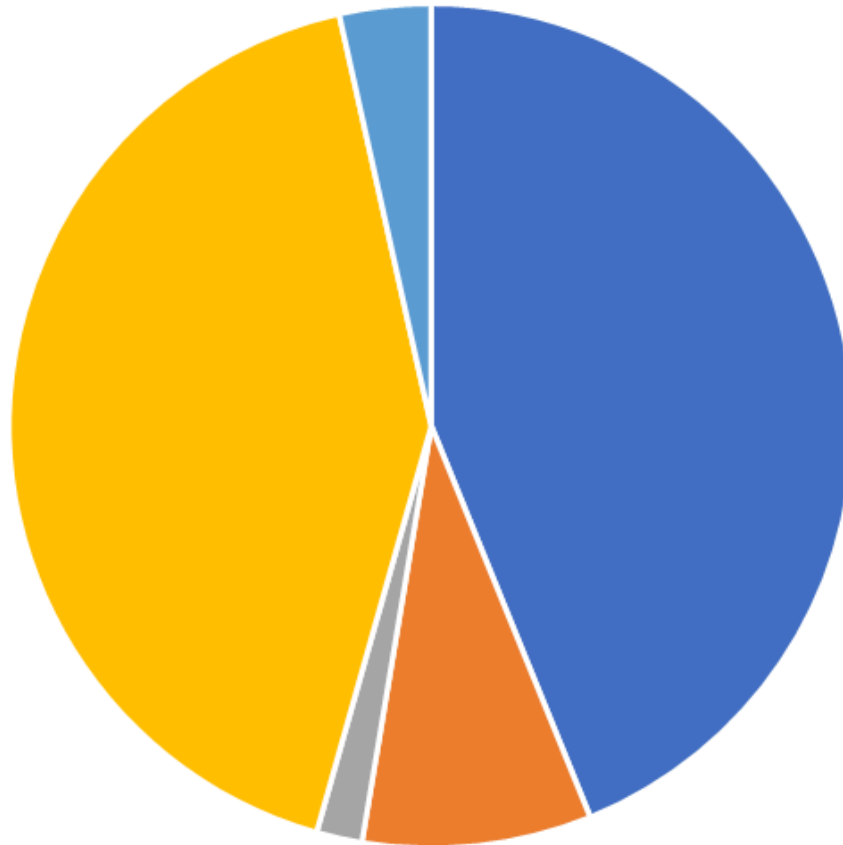
of financial support to community groups

**★ B - £43,257.88
MS - £48,260.53**



WHAT WE FUNDED

Types of Projects supported by Winter Warmth Funding



■ Warm Space ■ Community Event ■ Community Pantry ■ Revenue Costs ■ Sport

The Winter Warmth fund supported 25 Warm Space Initiatives, 5 Community Events, 1 Community Pantry, 2 series of sports sessions and helped 23 community venues with Revenue Costs.

CASE STUDY - THORPE MORIEUX VILLAGE HALL COMMITTEE COFFEE AND CHAT SESSIONS

The Village Hall Committee organised fortnightly coffee and chat sessions for the whole village community, from December 2022 – April 2023. Each session ran from 10am -12.30pm and provided a warm social space for people to meet friends and make new friends, over refreshments, including hot drinks and homemade cakes and biscuits. Funds were spent on venue hire, energy costs, refreshments costs, advertising and kitchen equipment.

The average attendance was 23 people per session. With a population of approximately 230 people, 10% of the population of Thorpe Morieux have benefitted.

What difference did the funding make to the group?

'This funding has enabled us to open up the village hall to the community of Thorpe Morieux fortnightly over the winter months and supported us with the additional fuel cost during this difficult time.'

'Thorpe Morieux is a small hamlet village with approximately 230 residents. It has no amenities other than the church and village hall. We have been able to provide a regular meeting place for people who live in the village and otherwise may feel isolated and lonely.'

'The process of setting up and running this has led to improved channels of communication and cohesiveness within the village community and has been supported by the amazing people who live in our village, who have given up their time and provided the wonderful home-made cakes and biscuits that have been enjoyed by all.'

What difference did this support make to your users?

'The people attending the café tell us that they greatly value the opportunity to get out and meet with others in the village, many of whom have attended multiple sessions, the café becoming something that they look forward to each fortnight. People have re-kindled old friendships and given the opportunity for new friendships to form.'

Feedback from attendees...

'I have been to 4 sessions and very much enjoyed them. The food is wonderful and it would be lovely to continue such a lovely way to see and catch up with folk.'

'I have only lived in the village for 1 year. I have found the coffee morning has given me a chance to meet people, who have welcomed me.'

CASE STUDY -

ELMSWELL PARISH COUNCIL

THE WESLEY AND COFFEE SHOP

Elmswell Parish Council were awarded Winter Warmth funding towards the provision of a community meeting space including coffee shop open 9.00 – 4.00 daily, including Saturdays

Funding was used for revenue costs.

What difference did the funding make to the group?

'We have observed a considerable increase in long-stay customers, including those from the adjacent Food Bank where we make free coffee shop vouchers available. We have enhanced our stock of books, magazines and children's play opportunities available to encourage this.'

'There has also been an increase in loosely-structured groups coming together for specific activities, such as Scrabble, a knit-and-natter group, book club and, most recently, a Bridge starter-group. These are often for our older community members and it is, clearly, important that they are comfortably warm – as also with the toddler cohort we are able to welcome in comfort.'

'We are also able to subsidise our 'afternoon tea' events which attract 40+ people who might otherwise have little differentiation in their day-to-day experience.'

What difference did this support make to your users?

'It has allowed many individuals the chance to develop the habit of socialising at Wesley which opens the door to wider community activities through the networking that ensues.'

Feedback from Attendees

'We could identify a dozen individuals who have told us how the Wesley has been a 'life-saver'. There are many more who have gained another dimension to socialising within the village.'

CASE STUDY - HOREHAM AND ATHELINGTON VILLAGE HALL COFFEE MORNINGS

The Village hall were already hosting regular coffee mornings which, prior to the pandemic, had been very well attended. Numbers of attendees have seen a dip since the pandemic however, as confidence has grown, the group have now had an increase in numbers and are heading upwards in attendees again.

The hall provides books and free Wifi, along with provision of laptops and a printer. Games, toys and children's books were also available.

The fund was largely spent on heating in order to make the hall a viable space for those wishing to utilise the warmth and space that this affords, and to give some respite for those who were struggling to stay warm.

What difference did the funding make to the group?

'The grant enabled us to extend the opening hours of the coffee morning for the warm space project – and without which we would not have been able to do so. What we did find was although we have a core group of attendees some of whom are finding the energy crisis an issue (many live on their own, or are caring for family members), this project also helped them to be able to socialise for longer in a safe, warm space. We know that there are people in our community who would not be comfortable in voicing their worry to others, so in this way, the project also benefitted them in a quiet way. We also found that there were some young families that regularly utilised the space (not necessarily every week) which was heartening.'

What difference did this support make to your users?

'The financial support to be able to offer this to the community has been invaluable. We are a very small village in an area of small, isolated, villages. The majority of the people that live in the village are quite elderly and not necessarily in the best of health, many do not drive or have to rely on others for transport to appointments, shopping, collecting prescriptions etc. The coffee mornings were started as an identified need for these neighbours. The last 3 years have been pretty devastating for so many of our neighbours, and feelings of isolation increased dramatically amongst them. We are now seeing a return to more normal levels of interaction and participation of these gatherings, but we maintain good standards of sanitation and procedures to ensure that confidence in socialising in our hall is growing.

Being able to participate in the project has enabled us to identify and evaluate the results, and see how this has impacted on our neighbours. In so many ways this has also been a beneficial programme for us as trustees by giving us this opportunity to observe and review the results of this, and therefore giving us a better view of how we can help moving forward.'

CASE STUDY - HINTLESHAM & CHATTISHAM PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL WARM SPACE & COOKING PROJECT

The PCC organised Coffee Stop drop in sessions twice a month in the Church Hall, including 3 slow cooker demonstrations followed by lunch (soup and a roll), with support from the Rural Coffee Caravan. Funds were spend on refreshments, resources for cooking session and heating church hall.

What difference did the funding make to the group?

'Coffee Stop is a regular event attended by mainly elderly people, several living alone. A nominal sum is charged for refreshments and, as heating costs increased Community Hall charges, the grant helped us to break even.'

'The Slow Cooker demos were a new initiative following up requests from elderly men living alone to broaden their cooking skills. Local ladies did the demonstrations and volunteers provided soup and rolls afterwards. We were asked to continue with the sessions so plan to start again next autumn.'

What difference did this support make to your users?

'The support has kept our costs at a minimal level.'

'The Slow Cooker demos raised enthusiasm to try new recipes as well as swapping ideas and passing on useful tips. The Soup lunches were much enjoyed in a sociable atmosphere although no one had signed up when it was originally proposed. The requests to continue show the need and we hope to include support for those living with Type 2 Diabetes in the autumn.'

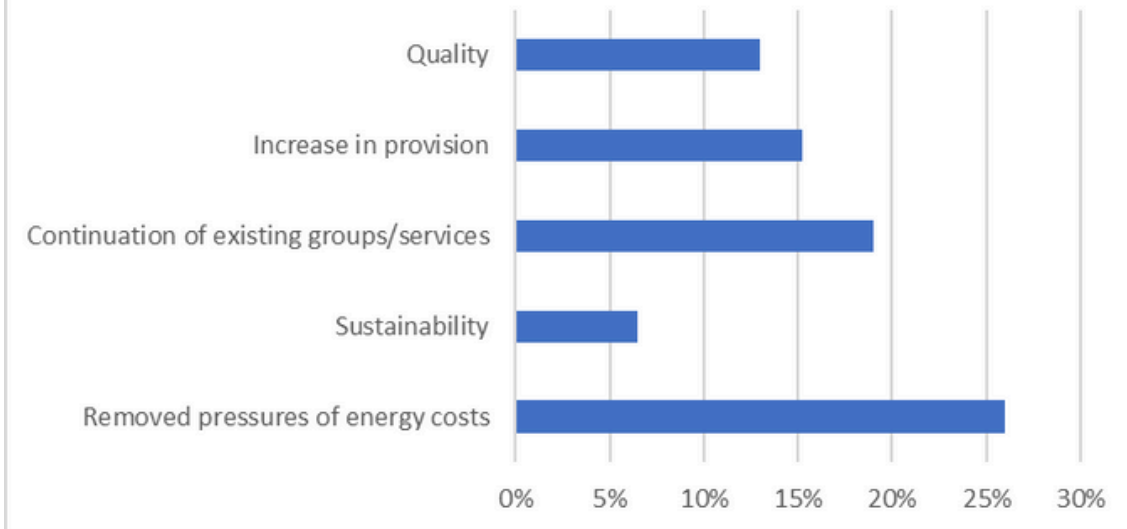
Feedback from attendees

Barbara, who comes to Coffee Stop said "As a newcomer to the village I'm alone in the house all day and see nobody so I like to come and talk to others and have made friends here".



FINDINGS - DIFFERENCE MADE TO GROUPS

Difference made to Organisation
(Percentage of 45 Responses)



From the monitoring we received from recipients of the funding, it appears that difference made to organisations fell into the below categories:

- Quality (13%)
- Increase in Provision (15%)
- Continuation of existing groups/services (19%)
- Sustainability (7%)
- Removed pressures of energy costs (26%)

Removing the Pressures of Energy Costs

It is clear that the main impact of the funding has been removing the pressures of energy costs from groups, as well as general running costs. The ability for facilities to subsidise these costs has enabled them to continue functioning as 'normal' over the winter period, and in many cases to offer additional activities and services to the community.

Sustainability

Venues receiving the funding also reported an improvement in the sustainability of their facility. In many cases local people became aware of local facilities they had not previously come across – this resulted in community groups seeing an increase in usage and hire, resulting in an increase in revenue for a variety of community facilities across both districts. The continued hire helps these facilities financially at an economically challenging time. Moreover, many facilities have been enhanced in the public eye - for instance improving heating has improved public perception of community facilities thereby promoting such facilities as more attractive venues to hire.

'It allowed us to keep our prices down in the café, by having grant funding money to help pay our heating bill, so that members of our community could afford to come and take advantage of our warm space to socialise and meet others.'

Stradbroke Courthouse and Library Trust

'The hall had a reputation as being a cold hall because of its high ceilings but this reputation is being eroded (due to funding)'

Shotley Village Hall Management Committee



FINDINGS - DIFFERENCE MADE TO GROUPS

'It enabled us to ensure that the look, feel and experience of the group was as good as we were able to achieve.'

Hadleigh Baptist Church

Quality

Some groups also reported on how the quality of the sessions they were offering was enhanced by the funding. The monitoring detailed how the funding enabled them not only to deliver new activities but to offer high-quality activities, ensuring that attending groups such as Warm Spaces was a worthwhile and pleasant experience. One group commented that the funding ensured that attendees felt they were attending an event that 'was not simply about meeting financial need, but was also enjoyable to attend'.

Continuation of Existing Services

Applicant groups have commented on how the funding has enabled them to continue to offer existing services to their communities. Without the funding it is likely that many community groups would have found this a challenge, with funding having to be channelled into increasing running costs.

'Rather than having to close for winter, we have been able to hold several social events for members wellbeing, Continue with the Community Hub providing support and friendship to vulnerable and lonely people.'

Rookery Bowling Club, Stowmarket

Increase in Provision

Some groups have chosen to continue their activities, initially started by Winter Warmth funding, over the summer and beyond. In some cases, some facilities have established new groups coming together for specific activities, such as Knit and Natter groups, book clubs, and Scrabble groups.

'[The funding] enabled our club to open on more occasions each week and give our local community the opportunity to feel warm and be in social company.'

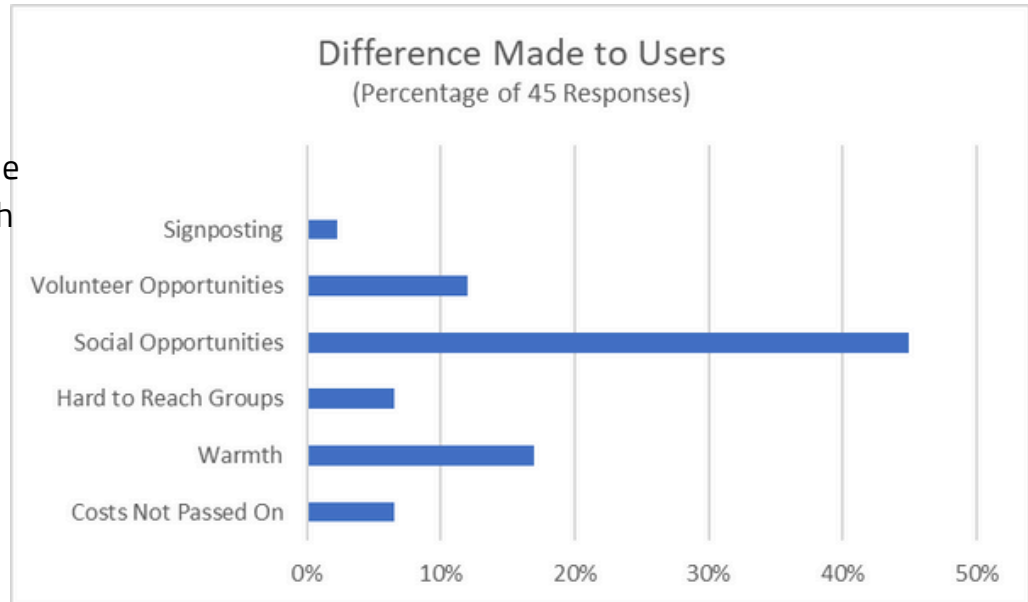
Sylham and Wingfield Village Hall



FINDINGS - DIFFERENCE MADE TO USERS

Groups reported that attendees to Warm Hubs and other sessions, and users/hirers of community facilities experienced the following as a result of Winter Warmth funding:

- Social Opportunities (45%)
- Targeting 'Hard to Reach' Groups (7%)
- Volunteer Opportunities (11%)
- Warmth (17%)
- Costs not passed on (7%)
- Signposting (2%)



'We could continue to offer the same quality of food and the same service as before in warm surroundings without increasing the cost to our members.'

Ansell Centre Charity

Costs Not Passed On

A central concern expressed by groups was passing increasing costs on to regular hirers of the facility. A result of the Winter Warmth funding was that costs were not passed on to hirers of facilities or to attendees of groups and activities. This ensured that communities did not miss out on important opportunities to socialise and engage with each other due to expensive venue hire.

Warmth

The monitoring reported that some attendees of groups did attend in order to avoid having to heat their own homes: in the feedback it was shared that some attendees considered it a relief to not have to worry about their own heating bills. This could have contributed to the ambient atmosphere reported by various groups who noted that their attendees enjoyment of the sessions on offer.

'Many of the ladies said they really looked forward to Fridays so they could meet up with friends and have a hot lunch and not worry about whether that could afford to put the heating on. Everyone seemed in a good mood and there was always lots of chat and laughter.'

Mendlesham Meet Up



FINDINGS - DIFFERENCE MADE TO USERS

Targeting 'Harder to Reach' groups

Many groups made an effort to ensure their groups provided a service for more vulnerable members of communities, who were likely to be socially and financially impacted by the cost of living crisis over the winter months. Particular groups mentioned were the elderly, bereaved and young families, all of whom were served by community groups who received Winter Warmth funding across both districts.

Some groups came up with innovative ways to engage with 'harder to reach groups'. For example, some groups were specifically aimed at older men and it was noted that during these sessions friendships were formed and skills learned that attendees would have otherwise not had the opportunity to pursue.

'Some mothers said that the children enjoyed coming to the space and had particular toys and activities that they looked forward to playing with. Others came because it was their only day off work and wanted a free place to take their child – often staying for most of the afternoon.'

St Peter and St Mary's Church, Stowmarket

'One of the biggest issues is loneliness, particularly for the men who came along. Having a hot meal prepared for them and a chance to chat and share memories was something that everyone commented on.'

Bildeston Sport and Recreation Ground

Social Opportunities

Attendees were offered valuable social opportunities. More often than not, group attendees described their sessions as a "lifeline", particularly to local residents who lived on their own or found it difficult to access social spaces. The opportunity to socialise and establish friendships was made clear in much of the monitoring submitted, underlining the importance of having free spaces to socialise which proved just as important as having free spaces available in which to keep warm.



FINDINGS - DIFFERENCE MADE TO USERS

Volunteering Opportunities

Much of the submitted monitoring commented on the enjoyment and stimulation gained by volunteers who were involved delivering the sessions. One group commented on how 'a number of people of differing ages have commented that their mental health has improved as a result of volunteering, meeting people and making new friends', whilst another mentioned 'All the helpers enjoy the company and the camaraderie.' This underlines how the opportunity to participate in a Winter Warmth scheme benefitted more people than just those attending.

'A number of people of differing ages have commented that their mental health has improved as a result of volunteering, meeting people and making new friends.'

Great Waldingfield Bowls Club

Signposting

Some groups also offered signposting services to their sessions - groups reported good attendance to their Warm Hub sessions as a result, which suggests that linking up local services and community assets such as Citizen's Advice and other community services is a productive way to bring communities together and ensure that varied services meet as broad an audience as possible.

'The warm friendly atmosphere resulted in a large uptake in the area with individuals coming from surrounding villages to access the CAB visit as well as the NHS Health Checks and the Adult and Children Coffee shop. These two coffee shops have greatly helped improve the mental and physical health of residents in our rural area.'

Memorial Hall, Walsham le Willows



FINDINGS - WHAT COULD WORK BETTER

Groups also reported on what was less successful about delivering Winter Warmth initiatives.

Attendance

3 recipient groups of the funding reported attendance/popularity to be too low to make group a success and the funding was returned.

Stigma

Our findings indicated that in some communities there was a stigma attached to the 'winter warmth/ warm hubs' label. Some groups that were purely Warm Hub sessions had a low attendance and others chose to 'rebrand' their sessions as coffee mornings. It should be noted that certain groups noted that their Warm Hubs were better attended when linked with other existing facilities or community assets, such as pop-up post offices, coffee mornings and NHS free health checks.

Existing Provision

In some cases the necessary provision already existed in the area, therefore the extra 'warm space' was not needed by the community.

'The Warm Space was important for companionship rather than heating homes.'

St Mary's Parochial Church

Attendee Priorities

Our findings also show that the focus on keeping warm is less prevalent than the social opportunities offered by the sessions - whilst 17% of groups reported that attendees came to sessions to keep warm, 45% of groups found their community attended to socialise.

'despite targeted approaches I feel we did not succeed in attracting the most vulnerable in the community.'

Bedfield and Monk Soham
Community Club

'Very few people came to warm space - this is because other provision was taking place on a Wednesday in a different venue in the village.'

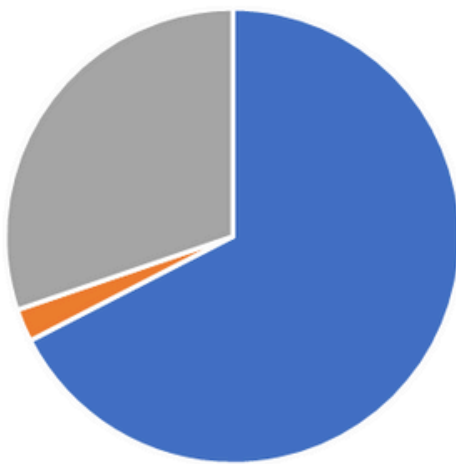
Bildeston Baptist Church

FINDINGS - WHAT COULD WORK BETTER

'Although the concept was for the whole spectrum of age groups, the main take up was from the more elderly.'

The Coddendam Centre

Timing of Session/Venue Open



■ Weekday (64%) ■ Weekend (2%) ■ Weekdays and Weekend (29%)

Limited Demographic

The monitoring we have gathered has detailed that much of the Winter Warmth funding has been focussed on particular groups, eg older people, whereas there appears to have been **significantly less provision for 'working age'** members of communities.

Main Issues Reported in Monitoring

- low attendance
- stigma attached to 'Warm Hub' label
- Other provision already existing
- Attendees preference for social groups rather than keeping warm
- Limited Demographic reach

Our findings show that, whilst 64% of groups/venues were open during the week, 29% were open both during the week and at weekends, and only 2% were open just at the weekend. This means that it is likely these sessions will not have reached 'working age' people who will also be affected by the cost of living crisis.



CONCLUSION OF FINDINGS

This report has provided an overview of the types of projects supported by Winter Warmth funding across Babergh and Mid Suffolk, and the feedback we received from recipients of the funding. The purpose has been to highlight the positive impact the funding has had on communities and to suggest how any similar schemes could be improved in the future.

The findings demonstrate support for a wide variety of community groups and facilities, the creation of volunteer opportunities and a reach of nearly 3000 residents across both districts. The feedback received highlights the impact of the funding on community groups and on the users of groups and facilities.

A main concern for groups and for venues is clearly the pressures surrounding the rising cost of living and especially energy costs in community facilities. The funding allowed groups and facilities to either continue their regular provision or start new groups, both to a high standard. Beyond the current period of a difficult economic climate, some groups have used their funding to help enhance their facility and make it a more attractive venue for hire, thereby improving the sustainability of the venue.

Users of Warm Hubs and of community facilities benefited from a varied selection of socialising opportunities and comfortable, well supplied settings in which to enjoy them. Many groups reported how the activities they were able to put on were a vital tool in combatting loneliness amongst the residents of our districts. Recipients reported that, thanks to the funding, they did not have to pass on any costs to the regular users of their facilities, thereby managing the affordability of venues. Some groups even managed to subsidise events as a result of the funding. Groups also reported not only on the positive impact of the funding on their users, but on volunteers who took part in the schemes too. Overall, it is clear that the funding was not only appreciated by groups and community venues, but necessary to help them to continue to offer a full service and support to their communities.



CONCLUSION OF FINDINGS

Whilst the benefits of the funding have been made apparent, as is often the case, there are elements that could have worked better. Some groups reported a difficulty rousing interest, despite local advertising - for instance, some schemes had more volunteers than attendees and either returned their funding or adapted the service they offered. This has been attributed to a stigma attached to the concept of warm hubs. Many communities had suitable provision already existing, therefore a new group was not required. It has also been noted that much provision tended to be aimed at the older population and sometimes families, rather than 'working age' people, demonstrated by the lack of weekday sessions - this means that many of the sessions catered for a limited demographic rather than reaching as many people affected by the Cost of Living crisis as possible.

In terms of the variety of information we have received from community groups and venues awarded Winter Warmth funding, our findings have given us some very positive feedback - whilst it is good to hear the positive impact of the funding, a reworking of our feedback process would be useful in order to gauge a fuller insight into what could work better. The findings also demonstrate that each community is unique which makes it difficult to regulate why warm spaces worked well in some spaces and not in others.

Should similar funding be offered in the future, it is clear that the Winter Warmth Support Fund has brought innumerable benefits to communities and has enabled crucial parts of community infrastructure, in the form of community venues, groups and socialising opportunities, to continue through the Cost of Living crisis. However it is clear that certain factors, such as the type of activity offered, the provision already existing in the community and the range of demographic that schemes would be able to reach, are important considerations to make in the criteria for any future funding scheme.