

ROCHDALE BOROUGHWIDE HOUSING IMPACT REPORT APRIL 2020 – MARCH 2021

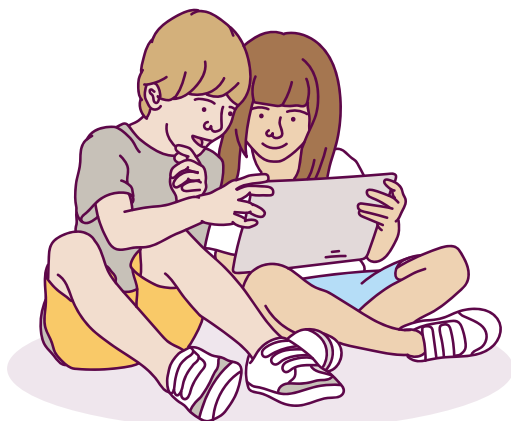


INTRODUCTION

Throughout a year of unprecedented challenges, RBH has successfully delivered projects that have contributed to the safety and wellbeing of our customers throughout the Borough, that have created strong and resilient communities, and that have provided social opportunities for those who have been most at risk of isolation as a result of the pandemic. Our existing relationship with customers and communities, prior to the increase in COVID infections, facilitated our quick response to support those who were left most vulnerable by the impact of national lockdowns.

Working with Public Health at the Local Authority, with colleagues in Health and Social Care, and with Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations locally, we established a referral pathway for tenants that needed additional support. We also supported the rapidly mobilised Community Response Hubs that provided emergency food, medicine, fuel payments and other services for those in need throughout the Borough.

We were able to extend some of our existing programmes to meet the increased demand for services such as Your Local Pantry, but remain dynamic enough to implement new initiatives such as the Digital Equipment Bursary. The following report demonstrates and evidences our impact over the previous year, a year where our community investment activity has generated more social value than ever before.



When we talk about community investment at RBH, we group activity under the 3 main themes of **Financial Inclusion, Health and Wellbeing, and Work, Skills and the Economy**. The previous year has seen some innovative work to decrease digital isolation and this work has been brought together under a Digital Inclusion section included at the end of this report.

FINANCIAL INCLUSION

The work we do under this theme aims to put more money in the pockets of our customers through both innovative projects delivered in partnership with the community and in-house services delivered by RBH.

This year we have generated £375,566 of savings and £410,761 additional income for our customers.

Your Local Pantry

Over the past year we saw a significant increase in food poverty and demand for the Your Local Pantry scheme. These sustainable food clubs continued to provide access to low cost food throughout the pandemic and were seen as a lifeline by members. Food partners, FareShare, benefitted from a surge in both donations and surplus food and this supported our ambitious target to double the number of members able to access the Pantry projects each week. We opened the Pantry to non-tenants for the first time and developed a new site in Freehold, where we knew there to be significant financial hardship.

In March 2020, over 150 new members signed up and started benefitting from Pantry projects in Kirkholt, Smallbridge and, later, Freehold. By May, more than 200 people were benefitting from access to a Pantry in these 3 neighbourhoods alone. This was generating £3,400 of weekly savings for members from the 800kg+ of surplus food that was being redistributed every week rather than going to waste. Around half of these members were shielding and received their weekly shop to their doorstep, often without any alternative option for accessing food and other household essentials.

This year, we have seen 7,866 visits to the Pantry projects, generating savings of £117,990 for our customers and saving over 40 tons of food from going to waste.

Our new Pantry Coordinator works with local community and voluntary groups to establish Pantry projects in other areas of the borough. This year, with the support of RBH, we have seen a Pantry open at KYP near Belfield and another one in development at the old Magistrates Court in Rochdale Town Centre.

Your Local Pantry Case study: Diana



We spoke to Diana who has volunteered at the Kirkholt Pantry for four years after becoming a Pantry member herself and seeing the value it offers local residents. It has proven a lifeline for many, particularly throughout the pandemic. Diana told us what she enjoys most about volunteering with RBH: "I enjoy volunteering with RBH, I've made new friends and it's given me the chance to give something back to the community. During lockdown I was shielding so I benefited then from having my Pantry order delivered to my door. It's good to be back and be able to help people who need it again."

We asked Diana how RBH had supported her in her volunteering role with the Pantry: "I've done a range of volunteering work in the past, but working with RBH staff at the Pantries has been great. Everyone's so friendly, there's a chance to build up new skills and get more involved if you want to, with training on offer for volunteers too."

Paint and Furniture Reuse

We offer access to low cost paint and furniture through our Re-Use Services. These projects work by re-using items that would otherwise have gone to landfill and they provide a lifeline to tenants who can't afford to furnish or decorate their homes, particularly if they're moving into a home for the first time.

Although these services have been reduced throughout the pandemic, we have still helped 152 people to access low cost furniture that has provided them with £23,283 of savings. **This service has prevented 16 tons of furniture from going to landfill. We have also helped 510 people to access low cost paint and this has provided them with £34,951 of savings and prevented 5.6 tons of paint from going to landfill.**

Money and Debt Advice

We operate a successful Money Advice and Debt Prevention service and have supported 1015 customers this year.

This has generated £199,342 of savings for customers and, by helping them to access additional benefits, increased their income by £410,761.

In addition to providing ongoing advice and support for all those in receipt of benefits, and a dedicated service for those moving onto Universal Credit, we have delivered a number of successful campaigns for the take up of additional benefits. Our Pension Credit campaign supported 14 customers to access savings and additional income totalling £87,797. Our Discretionary Housing Payment campaign supported 17 customers to access savings and additional income totalling £13,690. Through our campaign for the Back on Track support from United Utilities, we had tremendous success with 114 tenants receiving backdated payments and lower water charges totalling £47,433.



We recognise the cost of setting up a new home can be a challenge to many of our customers, and we have a dedicated New Tenancy service within the Income Services team to provide advice and support during the first 6 months of a tenancy, to help customers manage their rent account successfully and promote tenancy sustainment.



We want to prevent our customers having to consider high interest loans or illegal money lending, particularly at a time when people will be experiencing increased financial hardship. To reduce this risk, and provide other options for vulnerable customers, we have worked with Manchester Credit Union to incentivise setting up an account in an exclusive offer for RBH tenants.

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

The work we do under this theme aims to increase the health and wellbeing of customers and the communities in which they live. We work to increase the capacity of grassroots voluntary and community groups and we support those who can deliver services locally to access our Members' Community Fund. This year there has been a specific concern about increased social isolation and mental ill health and this has informed our priorities for investment.

Members' Community Fund and Supporting Our Local VCSE Sector

Our Members' Community Fund is our grant funding programme that can be accessed by small VCSE organisations that deliver services locally. Grants are awarded by a panel of RBH members throughout the year.

This year the funding was made available to projects and organisations that could deliver COVID-safe activities. We worked with local VCSE groups to help them think creatively about how

they could continue to provide essential health and wellbeing interventions either remotely or digitally. Some of these fantastic projects kept spirits high and helped people to feel less isolated, even if they were unable to leave their homes.

This year we have provided £97,959 of funding to 22 local organisations.

This grant funding has included projects such as The Veterans' Food Co – a social enterprise that retrain Veterans to become chefs. Throughout lockdown they have been working to produce hundreds of homemade nutritious meals to those experiencing homelessness and living in temporary accommodation.

They were also able to support our mission to deliver a Christmas meal to all 980 of our customers living in Independent Living Schemes.



Funding has also been able to support the launch of additional Your Local Pantry projects, homework clubs to support home schooling, a social wellbeing project for pregnant women, and a gardening group for people who have been isolated at home – to name but a few. RBH works with local grassroots organisations to build their capacity, provide training for their leaders, offer advice and support and link them with funding opportunities. Last year we provided support to 25 such organisations that deliver essential services to our customers and in our communities. Our relationship with these organisations helps us to make sure our customers have access to the support they need in their local area.



Case Study: K Stars Morris Dancing Troupe



K Stars have received funding through RBH's Members' Community Fund on several occasions because the panel can clearly see the impact social activities like these have in the lives of young people.

The leader of K Stars, Kirsty Fearnough – who recently won our Community Volunteer of the Year Award, told us more:

"My name is Kirsty and I've been part of Morris Dancing since the age of three and I've enjoyed every minute of it. I love the friendships it makes and the smiles it puts on little girls faces.

As I got older, I thought I would give it a shot at starting my own troupe up, to help the younger generation with socialising and it also keeps them off the streets on Friday evenings. It's giving something back to the community, which is something I received over my years throughout Morris Dancing. I never thought it would be this successful.

The personal benefits I get from volunteering is a sense of achievement, when my girls/troupe are walking away from competitions and championships with winning medals and trophies. I get a warm bubbly feeling inside and it makes me smile from ear to ear with pride!"

Reducing Social Isolation

Throughout lockdown we wanted to make sure none of our customers had fallen through the net of local support and were left struggling at home. We offered a proactive telephone service to reach out to those

who may have no other support or where there was a concern for welfare.

If we couldn't get through to these customers on the phone, we would visit their homes to ensure their safety. Our telephone service was most notable for customers living in Independent Living Schemes (ILS), where all 980 customers would receive calls daily.

We made over 3000 calls to our general needs customers and 44,400 calls to those living in ILS.

We worked with partner organisation, Living Well, to set up an option for tenants to receive regular telephone befriending. This service has now been rolled out to all tenants and regular referrals are made to Living Well for tenants experiencing loneliness.

RBH was responsible for the distribution of important information and other resources throughout the Borough. We distributed 1000 Get Creative art packs on behalf of local charity, Cartwheel Arts, to families who couldn't afford additional resources for home schooling. We also distributed craft materials to hundreds of tenants living in our Independent Living Schemes and afternoon teas as part of the VE Day celebrations.



RBH was also able to distribute 3000 Keeping Well at Home booklets in partnership with Rochdale Borough Council. This award-winning document offered information and advice to older people who were isolated at home during lockdown.

Our strong partnership with local charity, HMR Circle, meant we could react quickly for older people living in isolation, both in Independent Living Schemes and general needs properties. Whilst we recognise that not everyone is online, and particularly those in the older population, having access to online social opportunities was a lifeline for those who could connect. Circle developed an online version of their successful lunch clubs and kept in contact with their members by hosting quizzes and games nights.

WORK, SKILLS AND THE ECONOMY

The last year has seen a dramatic rise in UC claimants and much of this has been a result of jobs lost throughout the pandemic. However, we have continued to work creatively with partners in the public, private and VCSE sectors to generate opportunities for customers to access employment and training. We also support customers to access employment through the RBH Apprenticeship programme and through opportunities in our supply chain.

Last year 232 customers were able to access employment support or training, with a further 46 customers supported into paid employment.

Opportunities within RBH

Our successful Apprenticeship programme continued throughout the pandemic and last year we recruited an additional 4 apprentices, with 5 existing apprentices moving into permanent roles with RBH at the end of their qualification. There were also 2 additional customers securing employment with RBH following their engagement with the Apprenticeship programme. For the first time all our Apprenticeships were recruited from those living in RBH homes.

Last year saw an additional opportunity for our younger customers with the launch of Kickstart – a national programme to support young people who are struggling to find work. **We recruited 2 customers into 6 month paid roles within RBH and hope to recruit an additional 3 from April 2021.**

We also offer fully supported work placements and volunteering opportunities both within RBH and within projects funded by RBH. Last year we saw 11 customers volunteer over 4,200 hours of their time to the Your Local Pantry projects alone.

Working with Partner Organisations

We have been running a work and skills service throughout the pandemic and have continued to make referrals to our colleagues at the Rochdale Borough Council's Single Point of Access. Here, those who are seeking employment or training outcomes have access to a full assessment of their skills and aspirations and are placed with the most appropriate provider for their individual journey. We have made 36 referrals to this team this year, with 4 of those securing employment.

We have supported Upturn, a local social enterprise, to access funding from the WEA to deliver some

targeted support for those whose income has been affected by COVID. So far Upturn have worked with 24 tenants and have supported 8 back into employment.

Working with Bridge GM, we provide an Enterprise Advisor to Hopwood Hall College. We offer an employer's perspective for their Careers Strategy, helping them ensure they are delivering the right knowledge and skills to the Borough's young people. We also chair the Rochdale Enterprise Advisor group with most schools in Rochdale now having a dedicated Enterprise Advisor.

Case Study: Upturn 'Step Ahead'



Back in October 2020, RBH tenant Morgan was referred to the Upturn 'Step Ahead' Employment Programme after losing her job as Textile Designer with the Edinburgh Woollen Company when they went into administration. Highly skilled in her field and motivated to find another role, she recognised there were limited employment prospects locally and was open to exploring other ideas.

After unsuccessfully applying for multiple roles she decided to explore routes to self-employment. She was referred to the Enterprising You government funded scheme which offers up to 6 months support for individuals starting their own businesses. Although still actively looking for work in the meantime, Morgan is continuing to receive this support and is hoping to launch her own business and design label in 2021. We will check back on Morgan in the future to see how her new label is going!

Case Study: RBH Workswear Workshop



John is an RBH tenant who was being supported by Rochdale Council's Employment and Skills team. As an ex-offender looking to rebuild his life, John had been struggling to find work for some time, and it was having a strong negative impact upon his mental health.

Rochdale Council contacted RBH to discuss John's case and try to broker an opportunity through partnership working. An RBH contractor, Groundwork Ltd, had just begun a new contract and was in need of a reliable labourer who could start work straight away. Following an informal phone interview John was offered the job.

The final piece of the puzzle was to get John kitted out for his new job. By tapping into RBH Workswear Workshop and support from Rochdale Probation service, we were able to source new work clothes for John that would help him to carry out his new role.

Since starting his new job, John has moved from strength to strength. Groundworks' Marc Richardson remarked that he is "extremely reliable, a good worker and very keen to learn" and are tremendously pleased with his progress. John said, "I was in a very bad place emotionally and financially, I had never worked and I felt really depressed. I had lost my family and had never felt so low and stuck, I spoke on the phone to a woman called Amanda (from Rochdale Council) about my current situation and in only a very little time she had found me a job and also offered extra help with mental health. I am now feeling a whole lot better a lot happier and just all in all a lot better as a person and a father."

Amanda from Rochdale Council summed it up, "Together in less than a week we changed this young man's life."

Customer Training

We have developed an online set of accredited training courses that have been free to access for tenants and partner organisations. Last year 115 people benefitted from increased skills to help them secure employment or to help them deliver safer services to our tenants through their voluntary or community organisation.

We have also set up a multi-agency work and skills drop-in where customers can access money advice in addition to support to find employment or training. The first of these sessions have been held online, with 11 customers so far benefitting from support and guidance on offer.



New Pioneers Programme

We have continued to deliver our New Pioneers Programme in partnership with Rochdale Borough Council for people living in the College Bank and Lower Falinge communities. This programme offers intensive, ongoing support for those seeking employment or training, for those who have been out of work for a long time or those wanting a fresh start in a new career. Careers Brokers can provide bespoke support for each individual, tailored to their own learning outcomes and aspirations. Last year much of the support was delivered digitally to minimise social contact, however that didn't stop the programme from growing significantly. Last year the programme supported 34 'Pioneers' with 4 securing paid employment.

Social Value and our Supply Chain

We've also been working with our construction partners to explore how they can offer additional employment and skills opportunities. Seddon, Engie and Lovell have all offered opportunities for our customers to gain work experience on site whilst building new RBH homes. We have also received financial contributions to other projects.

Last year we were able to offer 9 apprenticeships through our supply chain and 8 work experience placements.

A key element of our Procurement Strategy is to deliver social value and one of the ways we do this is by looking to procure goods

and services locally. The % procurement spend for 2020/21, both in Rochdale and in Greater Manchester, has increased slightly from the previous year (to 49% and 51% respectively).

This amounts to £20.5M spent on goods and services in the Greater Manchester economy.

DIGITAL INCLUSION

Being digitally excluded has been more damaging during the pandemic for those who are isolated and who could not see friends and family. Being offline perpetuates loneliness and isolation and can contribute to mental ill health. It also creates significant disadvantage for job seekers as the world of work moves online. We wanted to react quickly to new and existing challenges being faced by those who are offline.

We set up a Digital Equipment Bursary for tenants who were actively seeking work to access a laptop or other digital device that would remove barriers to employment. We have been able to recondition and redistribute old RBH laptops in this process.

So far 19 people have benefitted from this service and some have used their new devices to secure employment at an online interview.

We also recognised that many families were struggling to home school their children because they either didn't have the right digital equipment or didn't have enough laptops to cope with the demand of both home working and home schooling. We started a laptop re-use scheme called Kit for Kids. This invited RBH colleagues to donate unwanted laptops and tablets from home, these were then reconditioned by local social enterprise, Digihut, ready for distribution to families most in need. **We reconditioned 25 laptops last year and are now seeking referrals for these.**



We supported the Digi-Tech Library – an initiative set up by a consortium of VCSE organisations that provides a loan service for tablets to anyone in the Borough. Thanks to our investment, we are able to refer customers to this scheme so they can

get online, connect with friends and family, access services or just do some shopping.

Finally, in one of our most pioneering initiatives, we are installing a 'Mesh Network' in Rochdale Town Centre, in partnership with RBC and with the Cooperative Heritage Trust. This project will bring free, good quality, high speed internet to 1500 homes in the area, making sure everyone is connected regardless of their ability to afford a home broadband connection.

This will offer potential annual savings of up to £450,000 for people living locally.

Case Study: Digital Equipment Bursary



We recently supported one of our tenants, Arron, 24, with digital equipment allowing him to take the next step on his journey to employment. Arron had completed several courses since leaving Hopwood Hall College including working for Groundworks Green Team, but had struggled to find long term employment. Having recently completed a L3 counselling course he's keen to secure work as a mentor, working with young people either in a school or community environment. Speaking about the impact the bursary has made, Arron said:

"Having access to this equipment will make life so much easier, completing learning by mobile is so difficult, seeing the document I'm working on is so much better."

We're thrilled that we have been able to support Arron to progress towards employment and am sure he will be successful in securing a suitable role soon.