

Supporting local communities and mapping community action

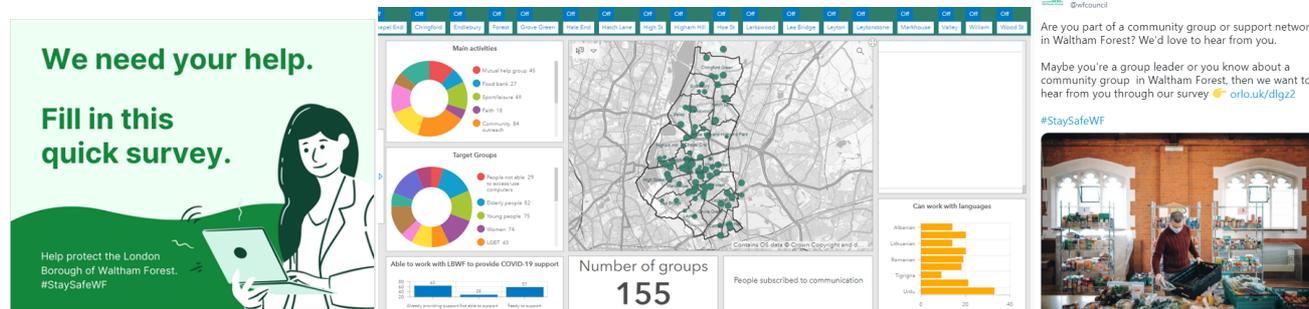
THE CHALLENGE: The council has an excellent record of working with the local voluntary and community sector. This was strengthened through our Connecting Communities programme and partnership working between the council and groups and organisations in Waltham Forest since flourished.

The pandemic has seen an extraordinary response from within our community. The urgent need to come together and offer support has been met by the established voluntary and community sector and a range of self-organising groups from within communities that will outlast the crisis. We needed to understand the many and different ways people were helping others and develop collaborative efforts to support our residents and quickly respond to local needs.

THE SOLUTION: To identify the range of different community and voluntary groups, organisations and networks in Waltham Forest, particularly those newly formed and working at small levels and more hyper-locally, the council undertook a mapping exercise.

This community mapping work aimed to more comprehensively understand the range of different community and voluntary groups and networks within the borough, including those that had formed in response to local need. This work was essential to ensure that the council had up to date information on community groups in order to provide mutual support in responding to the crisis and any new challenges and local concerns, quickly and effectively. It was also an opportunity for the council to be offer support and networking opportunities as part of the collective effort to organise this mass movement in a way that could be sustained during the pandemic.

Working alongside a commissioned partner with expert knowledge of the borough and prior experience of engaging voluntary and community sector organisations, work was completed to create a database of community and voluntary groups and networks, including those previously known to the council, and groups and initiatives in more local areas that have emerged and self-organised since the outbreak of COVID-19.



Survey work was completed, asking organisations and groups in Waltham Forest a small number of questions to understand their work and activities they were undertaking, any specific individuals or groups they aim to benefit, where in the borough they were located and operate, if they needed help from the council, and the sorts of support they might provide to one another. Our survey was promoted and shared widely and benefited from the strength of the local voluntary and community sector and the desire of residents to help one another.

As well as using the collected information to create an iterative database of the organisations, groups and networks active within Waltham Forest, an interactive dashboard has been developed, further enhancing local organising to support the most vulnerable in our communities.

THE IMPACT: The community mapping work has helped us to strengthen our understanding of community needs and facilitate local action, particularly at small and hyper-local levels. As well as improving our knowledge of more established voluntary and community groups, we have been able to identify 85 groups that were unknown to the council prior to the project, representing more diverse, smaller groups and networks.

The database provides a view of active groups across the borough, whether they are already working with the council and the ways they can support local COVID-19 efforts, ensuring that together we can mobilise and respond more quickly. This work has not only helped us to learn more about what is happening in the borough, but to identify gaps in support. We are more able to act in collaboration to coordinate a place-based offer, integrated across stakeholders and delivered at a local level, to where it is most needed. Having strong community infrastructure and supportive voluntary and community sector has been essential for residents in an uncertain time.