

Making the most of a difficult year: our pandemic story



Annual report and accounts

1 April 2020 — 31 March 2021

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Birmingham
Community
Matters

Our mission

Birmingham Community Matters (BCM) aims to boost the development and sustainability of small voluntary and community groups in and around Birmingham.

Our peer-to-peer learning network inspires people into action and gives them space to share their skills, knowledge and experience.

Our vision

Voluntary and community action is encouraged and celebrated in our city, with people empowered to make change happen – no matter how small. Ideas flourish and Birmingham communities grow stronger and more connected.

We call our approach peer-to-peer learning, as our Community Matters Helpers support people as equals, rather than as experts. They don't give advice or answers and they nearly always end up discovering something too.



Birmingham
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Matters

Our objects

BCM is established to promote the voluntary sector and promote the efficiency and effectiveness of other charitable organisations for the benefit of the public in the area of Birmingham and immediate surrounding areas by:

1. Helping to build the capacity of small voluntary and community organisations and provide them with the necessary support, information and services to enable them to pursue or contribute to any charitable purpose.
2. Promoting, organising and facilitating cooperation and partnership working between small voluntary and community organisations, statutory and other relevant bodies in the achievement of the above purpose within the area of benefit.

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**Everyone has something to learn and
everyone has something to teach**

Foreword

To tell Birmingham Community Matters' story of change and growth during the Covid-19 pandemic needs a little context: a potted history of our relatively new organisation.

BCM began in 2016 as a group of community volunteers who saw there was a lack of free, local and 'human' support for people in Birmingham who wanted to start and run small community organisations. We held face-to-face drop-in sessions around the city, expanding our services when we became a charity in 2018. Thanks to a grant in 2019 from the National Lottery's Reaching Communities fund, we took on staff to support the work of BCM's volunteer founders.

We all found ourselves facing a global pandemic in 2020. The challenge for BCM was to keep providing human contact and support when everyone was stuck at home and/or continuing to work in even more demanding circumstances than usual.

As community organisations adapted to the crisis and found ways to help people through, we were more determined than ever to offer them real, human support - even though it had to be at a physical distance.

We found ways to go online that maintained social connections with groups across the city. We also developed new services to meet the needs of the people that the pandemic had turned into volunteers for the first time - including workshops held via Zoom.

Thanks to the adaptability of staff, trustees, associates, Community Matters Helpers and partners, BCM did not stand still in 2020. By going online, we made many more connections across the city. Now coronavirus restrictions have eased, we plan to keep some of our online support in place - recognising that it is more accessible for many people.

Thank you to everyone who has been a part of BCM so far. Having survived and even thrived through a difficult time, we are excited for the next chapter in the story of our new and growing charity."

**Emma Woolf MBE,
Chair of Trustees**



Our adaptation story

‘Making the most of a difficult year’

In March 2020, the Covid-19 outbreak forced us to cancel in-person events and find alternative ways to deliver our support.

Being a small organisation, with team members already used to flexible home working, attending online meetings and delivering webinars, we felt confident in our ability to adapt.

“If we need to be physically distanced then we must be even more socially connected.”

Since the start of the pandemic we have preferred to use the term ‘physical distancing’ rather than ‘social distancing’, recognising that social interaction has never been more important.

Listening, reflecting and sharing

It was quickly apparent that the voluntary sector was grappling with unprecedented challenges while assuming a critical role in people’s wellbeing. Rather than jump in with our own interpretation of solutions, we listened and reflected on what frontline community organisations needed to deal with the crisis.

We created and shared resources for community groups on:

- ◆ Funding
- ◆ Research
- ◆ Adapting their services
- ◆ Staying in contact with and looking after their volunteers
- ◆ Mental health.



Delivering... differently



The pandemic galvanised our city's many existing volunteers - and inspired people to get involved in their communities.

We began delivering one-to-one sessions online. We responded to people's individual queries via telephone consultations and then matched them, via video call, with the Community Matters Helper best placed to help.

We received many enquiries from people setting up groups, as well as from people seeking to formalise their current groups. We helped people overcome challenges around managing money and establishing policies and procedures to meet the needs created by the crisis.

We hosted webinars and workshops on emergency funding and boosting funding success. We encouraged informal discussion during these sessions, and found they became important spaces for people to share ideas and worries at a stressful time.



"I feel a lot more confident about what I am doing and it now feels more achievable and I don't feel I have to put off what is planned for the next steps"

— feedback from someone starting a voluntary organisation in response to Covid-19.

Responding...

Rather than holding one to two events per week, as we had planned pre-lockdown, we were soon running a responsive 9-5 service.

To keep being efficient and reduce pressure on our Community Matters Helpers, we began hosting 'bite size' sessions for small groups of people, answering common questions.

“Do we need a structure for our voluntary group?”

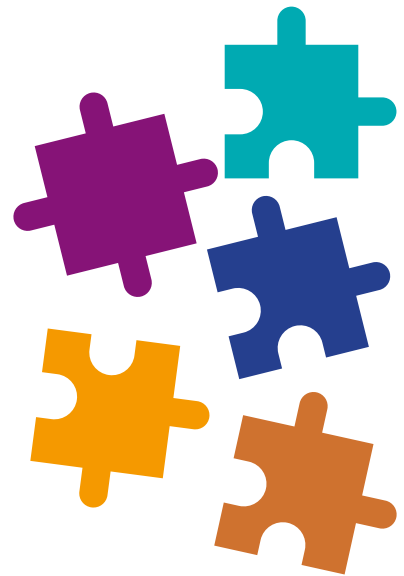
“What is a management committee?”

“How do I open a community bank account?”

Our achievements

This year, we are proud to have sustained BCM's social, supportive ethos by:

- ◆ Holding online one-to-one sessions - a new offering for BCM, giving people vital support with developing their community activities.
- ◆ Engaging new Community Matters Helpers to contribute to these sessions, expanding our network and giving volunteer support of more than 100 hours.
- ◆ Holding funding update webinars at the beginning of the pandemic, giving people essential help at a time when the funding landscape had changed suddenly and dramatically.
- ◆ Hosting multiple groups of people at workshops on funding, delivered by an experienced bid writer, offering useful feedback on unsuccessful bids, helping them improve future application success.
- ◆ Enabling peers to learn from one another's experiences in group Zoom sessions - on topics that included choosing a structure, risk assessments, safeguarding, and bringing volunteers back safely.



Expanding our reach

Delivering our services digitally during the pandemic meant we expanded BCM's reach across Birmingham – faster than we could have done by organising in-person events at venues around the city.

A learning opportunity

Before the coronavirus outbreak, the format of our drop-in sessions meant anyone could turn up with any question, and receive support from the Community Matters Helpers who happened to be volunteering on that day.

The changes enforced by the pandemic enabled us to fine-tune this approach, thanks to the initial contact required to schedule online sessions.

We now learn lots more about groups and their ideas or challenges prior to a video call, asking preparatory questions, matching them with a suitable Helper and providing resources if needed.



Engagement and interaction

This year we have been working to raise BCM's profile by:

- ◆ Sending a monthly email newsletter (and the occasional bulletin) to around 600 subscribers across the city.
- ◆ Keeping our social media platforms updated and engaging, gaining 746 new followers on Twitter (taking our total to over 2,000), and growing our Facebook following to nearly a thousand people from Birmingham and the Black Country.
- ◆ Keeping our blog fresh, with posts relating to Trustees' Week, qualification opportunities, Black Lives Matter and more.
- ◆ Maintaining an extensive page of resources for community groups responding to the coronavirus pandemic. We retired this page recently to focus on the new website.
- ◆ Holding a callout for a web developer, interviewing three strong candidates and commissioning Paul Tranter from Citrus Frog to build a new, user-friendly website that will improve our online presence, convey clearly what we do, and grow with us. Paul has been working with us through the lockdowns to develop the smart, highly accessible new site, which will soon be found at birminghamcommunitymatters.org.uk.

Our new website was made possible by the National Lottery's Reaching Communities fund. Its second phase (coming soon) will allow us to develop and share resources and opportunities for Birmingham's community groups as well as adopting a new CRM system to manage and keep in touch with these contacts better.

"This is a wonderful little newsletter. It's full of useful info with some lovely light bits too. Keeping it real for people and keeping it sane! That's what people want.

I will share some of this more widely - thanks! Keep up the good work you wonderful people"

— a reply to our April 2020 newsletter.



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 [/birminghamcommunitymatters](https://www.facebook.com/birminghamcommunitymatters)



**THANK
YOU
SO
MUCH**

Structure, Governance and Management

BCM is a small voluntary organisation, registered as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (Associated CIO) with the Charity Commission. The board of trustees has responsibility for BCM's policies, its strategic direction and priority. It also has full financial and legal responsibilities for BCM, its staff, activities, services, contracts and assets.

Thank you to our trustees who served BCM during the period covered by this report:

Emma Woolf MBE (Chair)

Chris Bonnard (Vice Chair)

Dipali Chandra (Treasurer)

Sandra Cooper

Helga Edström OBE

Emma Macpherson (appointed in May 2020).

“From the outset of the pandemic when we had to pause face-to-face events, our trustees were amazingly supportive. They backed our ideas to adapt the way we deliver BCM's services.

They were sensitive to our increased caring responsibilities outside of work. Their flexibility and compassion enabled us, in the long run, to achieve more than we thought possible at the beginning of the pandemic”

— Jo Burrill, Development Coordinator.



Our people

Thank you also to our core team:

Jo, Development Coordinator
Afsari, Development Assistant
Claire, Selly Oak Neighbourhood Network Scheme
Marie, marketing and communications
Kerry, graphic design and administration

And associates:

John Ellery, Get Grants
Rob Jones, Misfits Music
Francesca McDowell, Elevate
Manisha Patel

Community Matters Helpers

We are hugely grateful for the dedication and knowledge of our Community Matters Helpers – the people who work with us on a voluntary basis to give one-to-one peer support to small and emerging community groups across Birmingham. We truly appreciate their flexibility and enthusiasm for working so differently during the pandemic - moving from informal, face-to-face events to more in-depth sessions online.

During the period covered by this report, Community Matters Helpers gave 322 hours of their time to our sessions, at an approximate economic value of £6,353.



Our partners

We are thankful to senior officers from Birmingham City Council, especially Karen Cheney and colleagues from the Neighbourhood Development Support Unit, who have provided invaluable support to our trustees and staff. Their insight is giving a strategic context to the development of BCM across Birmingham.

We are grateful to our colleagues in other infrastructure support organisations for being crucial supporters of and collaborators with BCM. Thank you:

- ◆ Locality
- ◆ Small Charities Coalition
- ◆ Birmingham Voluntary Sector Council (BVSC)
- ◆ Sandwell Council of Voluntary Organisations (SCVO)
- ◆ West Midlands Funders Network
- ◆ Migrant Works CIC (MiFriendly Cities project)
- ◆ Bournville Village Trust Community Development Team
- ◆ Coalition of Efficiency
- ◆ Birmingham Partners.

This year we have begun to align our offer with the grantmaking of funders in the region especially National Lottery funding officers and colleagues at Heart of England Community Foundation and Severn Trent Community Fund. We have benefited from their support and insight into the state of the sector and their trust in referring groups to us in need of support.

We have also been pleased to work with the following organisations to deliver activities to support voluntary and community groups in Birmingham:

- ◆ Age Concern
- ◆ Age UK
- ◆ Aston Villa Community Foundation
- ◆ Birmingham Settlement
- ◆ CASE @ Soho Community Hall
- ◆ DigiKick
- ◆ Disability Resource Centre
- ◆ Gateway Family Services
- ◆ Holloway Hall Community Association
- ◆ Karis Neighbourhood Scheme
- ◆ Moseley Community Development Trust
- ◆ New Frankley in Birmingham Parish Council
- ◆ Northfield Community Partnership
- ◆ PohWER
- ◆ Saathi House
- ◆ Stirchley Baths.

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Our values

One of our development tasks this year was to establish a set of values that underpins our day to day work. We worked with staff, volunteers and trustees to prepare these values. When we can resume our face-to-face events, we will be checking in with partners and supporters to make sure that they agree.

Thoughtful

People come first. We are compassionate towards one another and our supportive working culture encourages us to be compassionate to ourselves as individuals and to model that style of working to the groups we support. We embed inclusivity and accessibility into everything we do.

Listening

Our motto (below) – and peer-to-peer learning model – reflect the value we place in each person's knowledge and experience. We seek to nurture a diverse team of employees, associates, Community Matters Helpers and trustees, valuing the different worldview that every individual brings.

Adaptable

We are open to new opportunities, thoughts, and ways of doing things. We respond to the needs of the people and groups we support, as well as the changing needs of communities. We are innovative in our approach to reaching people, and keep our working systems flexible so we can react quickly to new situations — and we never assume we've got everything right.

Empowering

We are generous with our knowledge, connections and experience. We work with people to explore what their next step should be, rather than telling them what to do. We are comfortable with not having the answer straight away, taking an iterative approach to solving problems.

Authentic

We foster a culture of openness, sharing our failures as well as celebrating our achievements. We view mistakes as part of being human – and a vital way of learning. This frees us to try new things, 'fail fast' if needed, and find more effective ways forward.



Everyone has something to learn and everyone has something to teach

Our next steps

"I feel refreshed. I feel energised to look at this again with fresh eyes"

— feedback from our first online session from a committee member of a group which helps new migrants.

As Birmingham emerges from the pandemic, we look forward to supporting community and voluntary groups in person again and reaching people who may be digitally excluded – those who rely on community venues and face-to-face conversations to get most of their information.

We will continue building our diverse network of community venues across the city which can host these sessions – while nurturing strong ties with our existing partners.

Recognising the increased accessibility and efficiency afforded by video calls, we will continue delivering online sessions alongside our real-life events.

Some of our drop-in sessions may be a physical and virtual hybrid, with a digital screen for people who cannot, or would prefer not, to come in person to the venue on that day.

We will continue to hold small group sessions on important topics, their content informed by the community groups we support and the challenges they face or the questions they ask.



Priorities for the coming months

- Continue seeking and securing funding to maintain BCM's operation and further enhance our support to the city's volunteers and communities
- Recruit more Community Matters Helpers to reflect Birmingham's geography and demography
- Support and develop our existing team – of staff, associates and volunteers
- Continue to put out high-quality communications, and grow our mailing list
- Continue sourcing and developing valuable resources - and capitalise on our new website as a vehicle for sharing them, as well as for raising awareness of BCM
- Recruit additional trustees to further enhance the capacity, skills and diversity of our board.

Financial review

Our reserves policy

BCM has a reserves policy which is reviewed every 24 months. The latest policy was reviewed and approved on 24 June 2020. The current reserves policy is to hold as free reserves a level equivalent to four weeks outgoing resources for critical operations for the financial year 2020/2021 and as a target for 2021/2022 to hold as free reserves a level equivalent to eight weeks of outgoing resources for critical operations plus an estimate for redundancy for existing staff.

Accounts

Receipts and payments accounts for the year ended 31 March 2021

	Un-restricted funds	Restricted funds	Total 2021	Total 2020
	£	£	£	£
Receipts				
Grants	-	81,874	81,874	46,649
Other income	1,650	-	1,650	-
Total receipts	1,650	81,874	83,524	46,649
Payments				
Salaries and staff costs	-	44,435	44,435	20,973
Administrator's fees	-	3,000	3,000	-
Staff recruitment	-	-	-	49
Staff travel and subsistence	-	-	-	347
Staff training and development	-	262	262	140
Consultancy/partner costs	-	5,236	5,236	3,870
Professional fees/evaluation	-	600	600	1,175
Venue hire	-	-	-	150
Marketing	-	11,087	11,087	200
Office costs	36	2,118	2,154	172
Insurance	-	464	464	312
Equipment	-	302	302	1,403
Independent Examiner's Fee	-	550	550	-
Bookkeeping/accountancy	450	1,753	2,203	-
Total payments	486	69,807	70,293	28,791
Net receipts over payments	1,164	12,067	13,231	17,858
Cash funds last year end	5,355	21,445	26,800	8,942
Transfers	-	-	-	-
Cash funds this year end	6,519	33,512	40,031	26,800

Accounts

Statement of assets and liabilities at the end of the year

	Un-restricted funds	Restricted funds	Total funds 31/3/21	Total funds 31/3/20
10.1 Cash Funds	£	£	£	£
Bank Balances	6,519	33,512	40,031	26,800
10.2 Restricted fund balances	Fund balance at 1/4/2020	Receipts	Payments	Fund balance at 31/3/2021
	£	£	£	£
National Lottery Reaching Communities	11,838	71,874	(62,003)	21,709
Selly Oak Neighbourhood Network Scheme	9,607	10,000	(7,804)	11,803
Total	21,445	81,874	(69,807)	33,512

Signed on behalf of the Board of Trustees

Signature

Print name Emma Woolf
Chair, Birmingham Community Matters

Date 5 November 2021

Report of the Independent Examiner

Independent Examiner's Report to the Trustees of Birmingham Community Matters on the receipts and payments accounts for the year ended 31 March 2021.

I report to the trustees on my examination of the accounts of Birmingham Community Matters ('the Charity') for the year ended 31 March 2021 which are set out on pages 18 & 19

Responsibilities and basis of report

As the trustees of the Charity you are responsible for the preparation of the accounts in accordance with the requirements of the Charities Act 2011 ('the 2011 Act').

I report in respect of my examination of the Charity's accounts carried out under section 145 of the 2011 Act and in carrying out my examination I have followed all the applicable Directions given by the Charity Commission under section 145(5)(b) of the 2011 Act.

Independent examiner's statement

I have completed my examination. I confirm that no material matters have come to my attention in connection with the examination giving me cause to believe that in any material respect:

Accounting records were not kept in respect of the Charity as required by section 130 of the Act; or

The accounts do not accord with those records.

I have no concerns and have come across no other matters in connection with the examination to which attention should be drawn in this report in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

Karen Hanlan, ACA, ACIE

Date: 5 November 2021

Karen Hanlan Independent Examiner Ltd,
12 Waterloo Close, Wellesbourne, CV35 9JG



Birmingham
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Birmingham Community Matters (BCM) is a charity registered in England and Wales: 1179442.



Registered office: Stirchley Baths, 2-4 Bournville Lane, Stirchley, Birmingham B30 2JT.



info@birminghamcommunitymatters.org.uk

www.birminghamcommunitymatters.org.uk

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