

ROTHERHAM HEROES EVALUATION



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DATA LIMITATIONS

- All data in this report is dated up to and including 28 February 2021, unless otherwise stated
- It should be noted that discrepancies exist in this data due to inconsistent reporting methods and, in some instances, the duplication of records
- Volunteer survey results are based on a total of 143 respondents
- Staff survey results are based on a total of 36 respondents

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INTRODUCTION

In March 2020, Rotherham Community Hub (RCH) was established by the Council in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. The purpose of this was to provide support to residents across Rotherham who had in any way been impacted by the pandemic. Rotherham Community Hub was set-up rapidly and initially utilised staff from within the Assistant Chief Executive's Directorate although staff from across the Council were later redeployed to meet the ongoing needs of the Hub. A call out was also made to residents across the Borough to become a 'Rotherham Hero' volunteer by helping to deliver the physical response to support requests received by the Hub. The response to this call out was an unprecedented offer of help and by the end of February 2021, 1241 volunteers had registered to support the programme. At the height of the pandemic in early summer 2020 there were up to 490 active volunteers. At the time of writing (May 2021) there are currently 166 active volunteers.

An evaluation of Rotherham Community Hub, conducted in November 2020, highlighted a number of recommendations in regards to development of the Rotherham Heroes programme and provision of support for volunteers. By gathering feedback through staff and volunteer surveys, informal interviews and comments from partner organisations, this report evaluates the success of the Rotherham Heroes volunteer programme and studies the impact it has had on the Council's overall response to the pandemic as well as those whom the volunteers have directly supported. Critically, it also assesses the lessons learnt in order to create a positive legacy and develop a comprehensive and engaging volunteer offer across Rotherham in the future.

PROCESSES

PROMOTION

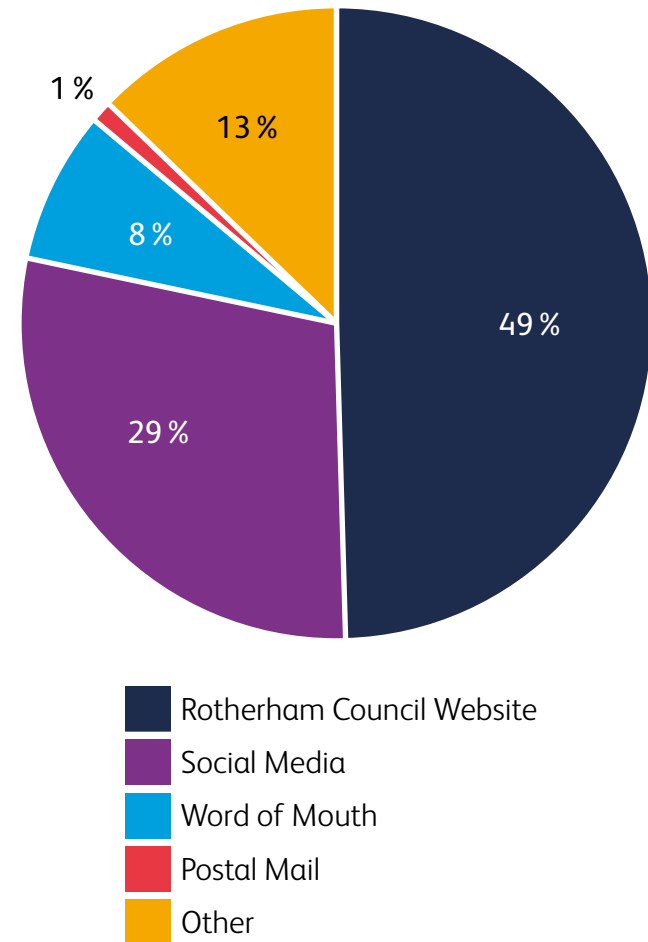
In line with the rapidly developing pandemic, it was imperative that the establishment of Rotherham Community Hub was quickly promoted to Rotherham residents to make them aware of the ability to either request support or request to volunteer.

Various methods of promotion were used including:

- social media marketing
- Borough-wide mail drop
- community and voluntary groups
- other media (e.g. television and radio)

Volunteers surveyed highlighted that the most effective method was via the Rotherham Council website, with 49 per cent of respondents stating that this was their original source of information on the volunteer programme

How did you hear about the Rotherham Heroes programme?



PROCESSES

RECRUITMENT

Following the initial call out, residents were able to register to become a Rotherham Hero by submitting an application form on Rotherham Council's website or by calling the Hub's helpline. Overwhelmingly, 98 per cent of volunteers applied by using the online application form.

Applications could either be submitted by an individual or on behalf of a business / community group. The latter allowed organisations to offer their support as a collective, utilising assets that may not be available to individual volunteers e.g. supermarkets providing food and hauliers offering transportation.

435 groups (and businesses) registered to provide support through the Rotherham Heroes web form, however many more were identified through other channels – a large number via existing contacts of Council officers.

Within the application process, volunteers and groups were asked to identify the type of support they were able and willing to offer. The options were:

- Delivering food parcels (and/or food shopping)
- Prescription collection
- General support with loneliness (telephone befriending)
- Pet care / dog walking
- Advice and signposting to other support services
- Other

The overwhelming majority of volunteer applications were received in April 2020 during Rotherham Community Hub's first month in operation. Small but steady numbers of applications have been seen since then, with peaks during subsequent national lockdowns in November 2020 and January 2021.



PROCESSES

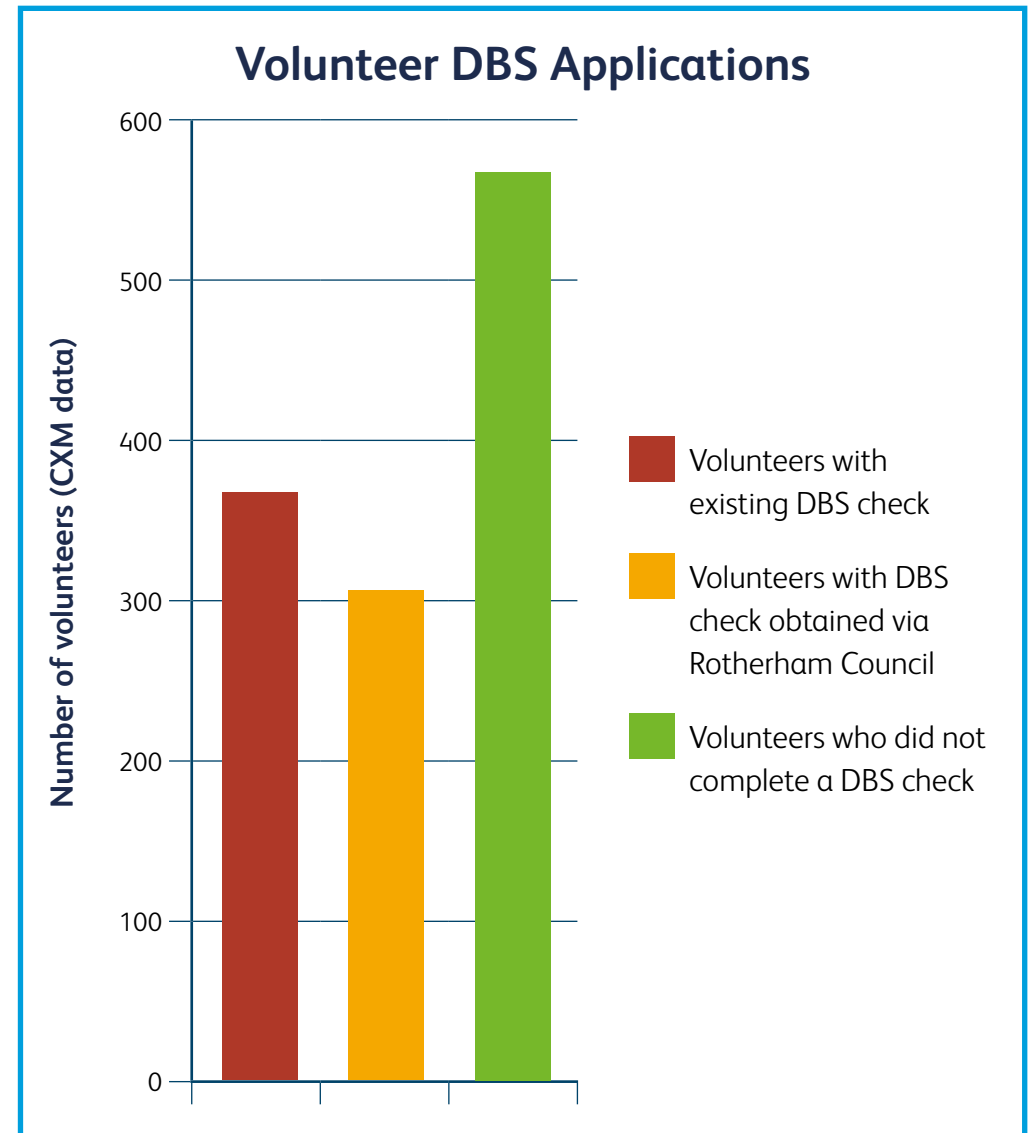
DISCLOSURE & BARRING SERVICE CHECKS

As part of the application process, volunteers were required to have completed a Disclosure & Barring Service (DBS) criminal record check dated within three years. If volunteers did not have a valid DBS at the time of applying, the Council sent applicants the necessary information to do so and covered the cost of the check. This, however, proved to be a barrier and a large proportion of applicants did not go on to complete a DBS check. This, therefore meant that they could not be a part of the Rotherham Heroes programme.

As suggested in the evaluation of the Rotherham Community Hub, this barrier may have been due to volunteers assuming the DBS application process was extensive or that they may have to contribute financially.

After review in late 2020, steps were taken to make it clearer that volunteers would not incur costs at any stage, and changes were made to the website and application form to highlight this.

The accumulated cost, to date, of processing DBS checks for 305 Rotherham Hero volunteers is £9302.50.



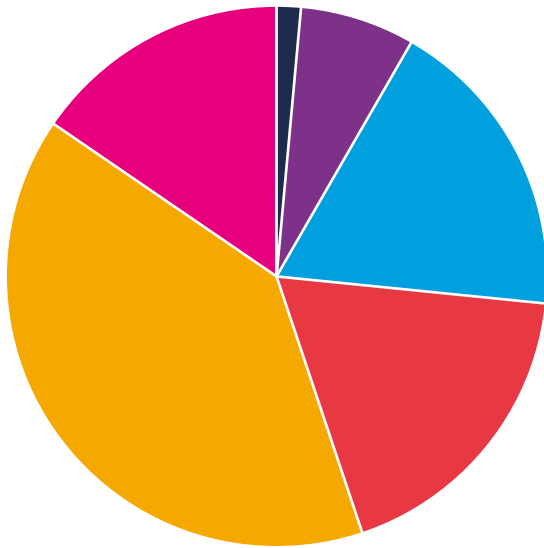
PROCESSES

VOLUNTEER DEMOGRAPHIC

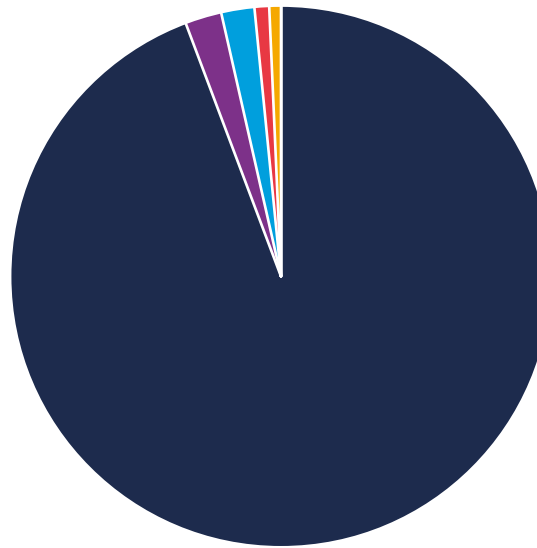
There was no requirement to obtain equal opportunities monitoring information from volunteers and so there is limited data to analyse the demographic of Rotherham Hero volunteers.

Results from surveyed volunteers highlight that the largest proportion of respondents were female, aged 55-64 and of White British ethnic origin.

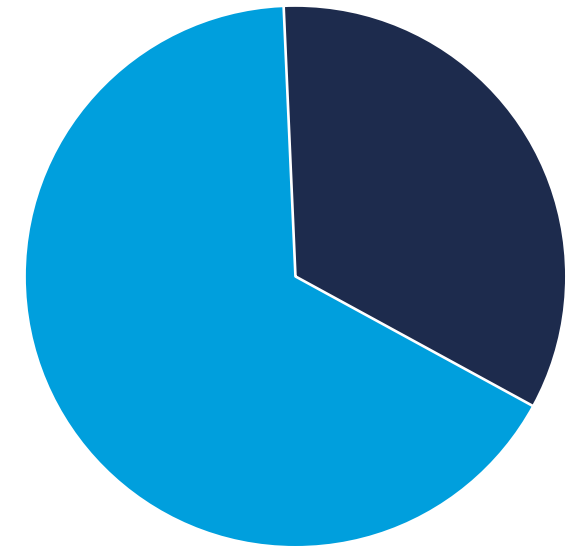
Rotherham Heroes by Age



Rotherham Heroes by Ethnicity



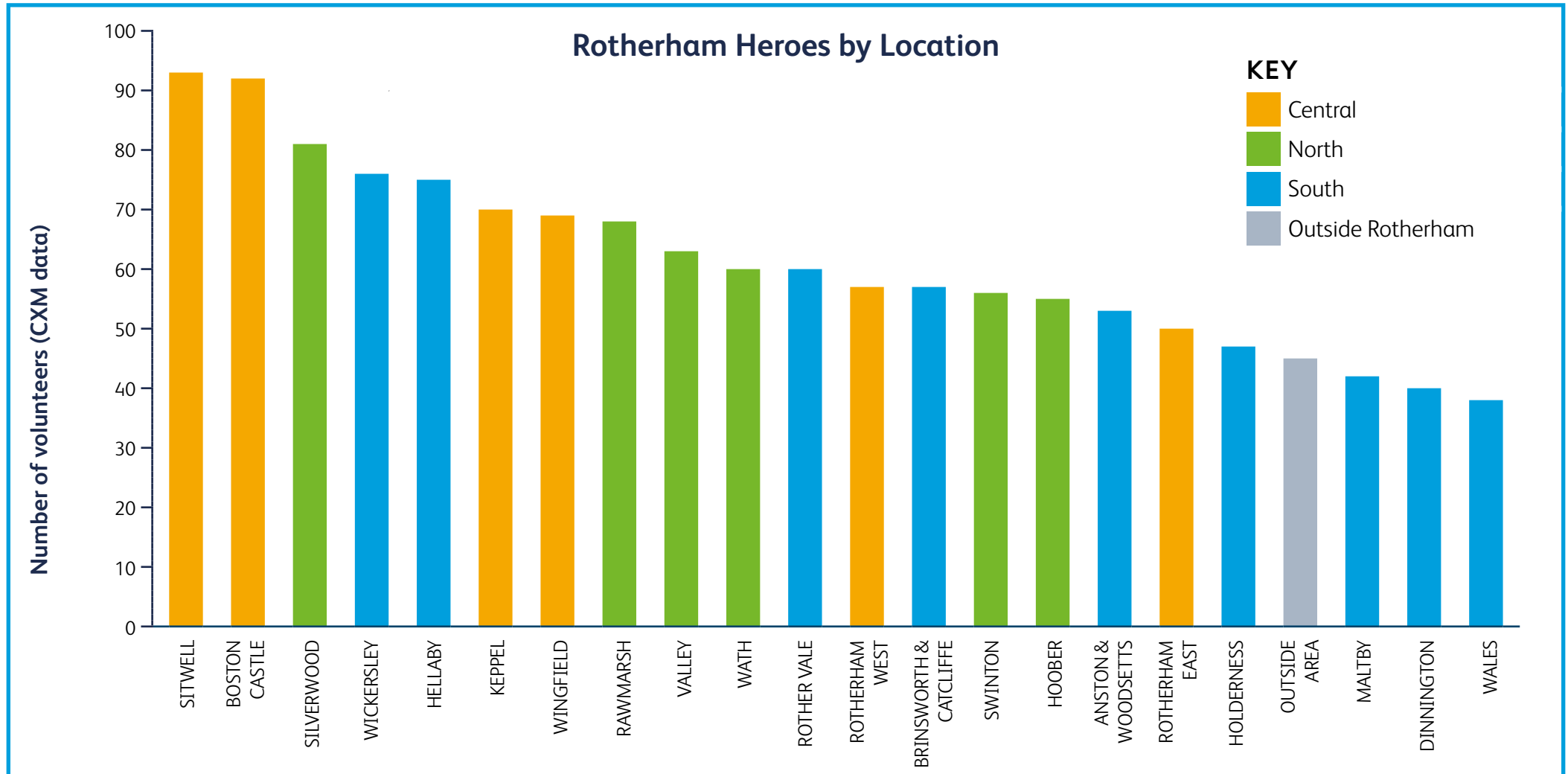
Rotherham Heroes by Gender



PROCESSES

VOLUNTEER DEMOGRAPHIC

Volunteers were recruited from across the Borough with uptake from all 21 wards as well as from outside of Rotherham.

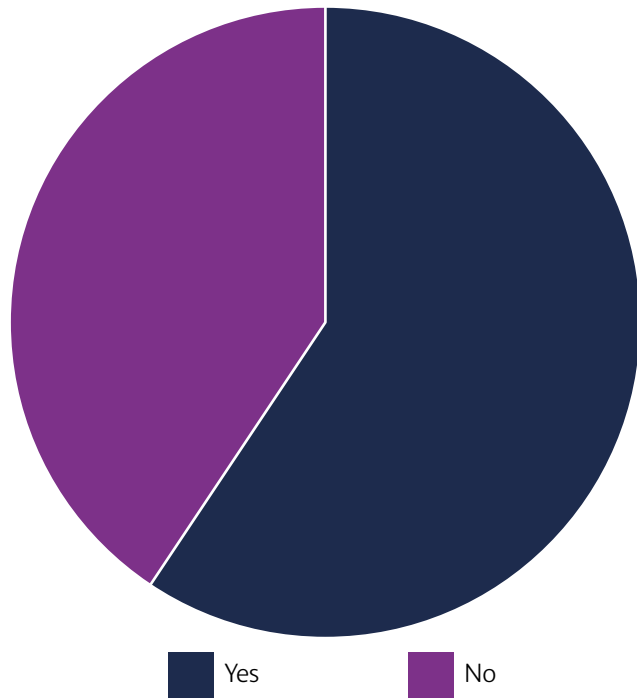


PROCESSES

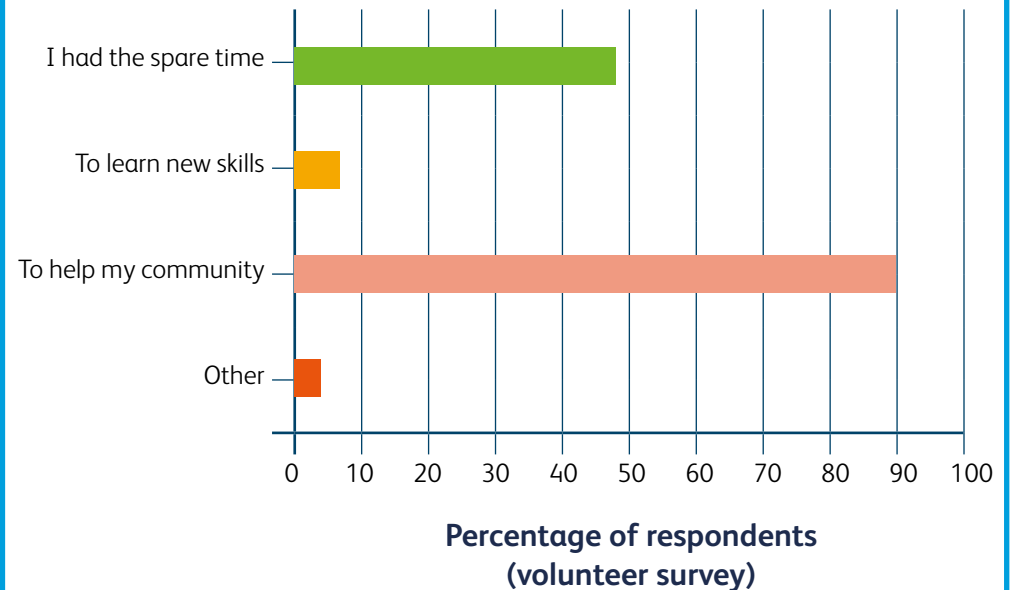
41 per cent of volunteers surveyed stated that they had never volunteered before becoming a Rotherham Hero.

Those who had undertaken volunteering roles previously (59 per cent) listed a wide variety of roles at organisations including animal sanctuaries, sporting events, schools and churches.

“Had you volunteered before becoming a Rotherham Hero?”



Rotherham Heroes – Volunteer Motivation



90 per cent of volunteers surveyed stated that their main motivation for registering as a Rotherham Hero was to help their community.

48 per cent of volunteers stated that they had spare time. This was to be expected with 'Stay at Home' messages enforced across the country and a high number of individuals placed on the UK Government's furlough scheme.

6 per cent of volunteers stated that they were motivated to learn new skills and 4 per cent of volunteers responded with 'Other' – these answers were all in some way related to supporting others and collectively 'doing their bit' during the pandemic.

PROCESSES

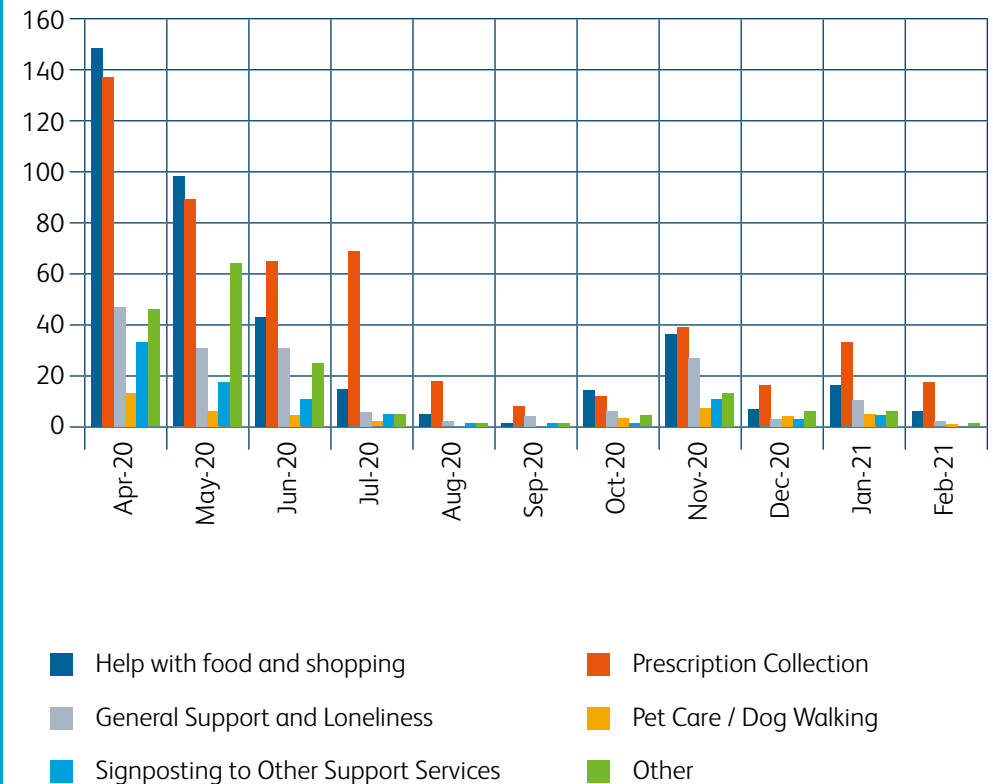
DEPLOYMENT

The process of matching volunteers to support requests was largely undertaken by staff within the Neighbourhoods Service. Neighbourhood Coordinators (NCs) have built strong relationships with local communities and organisations throughout Rotherham, which has given them a strong understanding of vulnerability in local communities and connections to support providers.

Using a 'tailor-made' Case Management System (CXM), NCs were able to liaise with the customer (requesting support), identify a suitable Rotherham Hero volunteer and make a connection between the two. This process formed relationships between both customer and volunteer, and many volunteers became regular providers of support to the same customer/s.

The most frequent support tasks undertaken by volunteers were prescription collections and completing food shopping / delivering food parcels. The fewest number of support requests related to dog walking and wider pet care.

**Month by Month:
Volunteers Deployed by Support Types**



PROCESSES

In addition to the triage of customer support requests and subsequent allocation of volunteers, there was demand for Rotherham Heroes to provide support to departments within the Council to assist their coronavirus response efforts.

Colleagues in Adult Social Care, Member & Civic Support and Children and Young People's Services all identified volunteer opportunities which were advertised to Rotherham Heroes. This allowed volunteers to not only support individual residents, but be part of a wider COVID-19 taskforce.

As the pandemic has evolved and the demand for volunteers to support residents has reduced, efforts have been made to identify opportunities outside of the Council to keep volunteers active and engaged. Since January 2021, volunteers have had the opportunity to:

- support Timebuilders 'social supermarket' at Rotherham Minster
- register interest in supporting surge-testing across the Borough
- support the delivery of food parcels as part of the Easter 'Healthy Holidays' initiative
- support Council foodbank



582 deliveries of
PPE made by
volunteers



6,389 food
parcels
provided by Rotherham
Council



2,621 food and
activity
parcels delivered to
eligible children



1,089 households
affected
by Covid-19 have been
supported

PROCESSES

ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS

As the COVID-19 response was established rapidly and both the local and national situation was quickly changing, there was no time to develop or implement a standardised approach to volunteer engagement. NCs were the primary contact that volunteers had within Rotherham Council and communication with these staff members was on a case-by-case basis.

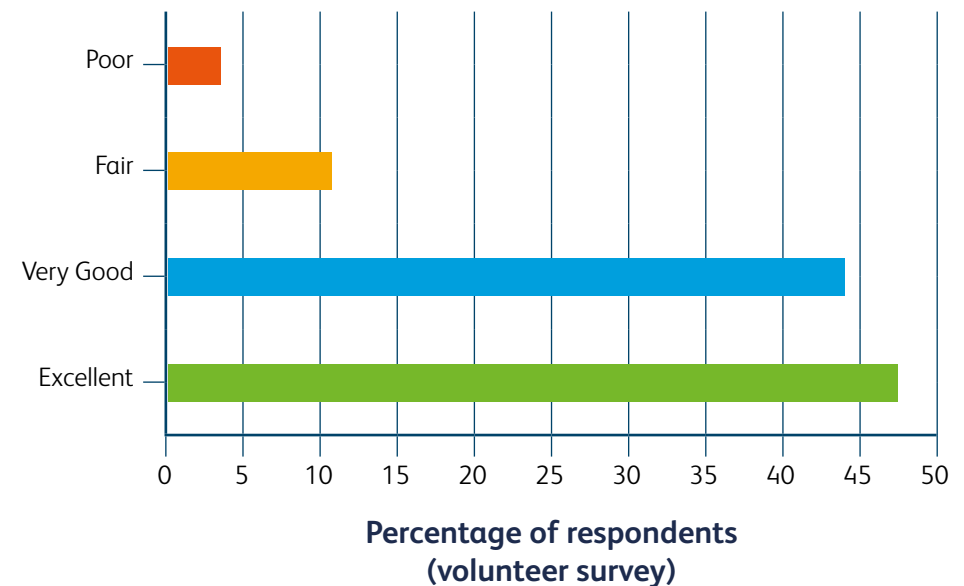
The Corporate Communications function of the Council later implemented and delivered electronic volunteer newsletters which contained updates on the Council's response efforts, advertised volunteering opportunities and showcased the good work that the Heroes were undertaking in their communities.

In late 2020, three Volunteer Coordinators were appointed to Rotherham Council to – amongst other work areas – develop and expand the Rotherham Heroes programme. A key priority upon their commencement was to engage with existing volunteers and solidify their relationship with the Council.

86 per cent of volunteer respondents rated the support provided by Rotherham Council on the Rotherham Heroes programme either 'Excellent' or 'Very Good' with individuals expressing that "contact was clear and informative", staff were "understanding of individuals circumstances" and that they "always asked politely with clear instructions and details of help needed".

3 per cent of respondents, however, rated the support 'Poor' and there was a trend in comments of volunteers highlighting 'intermittent' communication and that they had not yet been contacted to carry out any volunteering tasks (see Challenges and Recommendations section).

“How would you rate the support from Rotherham Council on the Rotherham Heroes programme?”



PROCESSES

PARTNERSHIP WORKING

Although lead by Rotherham Council, the Rotherham Heroes programme was a coordinated response and involved numerous third-party organisations. These ranged from partners in the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS), the NHS and local businesses. The Rotherham Heroes programme – as well as the wider Community Hub – relied on the expertise, networks and databases of these VCS organisations to maximise the response for both customers and volunteers.

These organisations provided support by:



Assisting in the establishment of the Rotherham Heroes programme by offering best practise



Advertising opportunities



Signposting volunteers



Information sharing



Accommodating regular meetings to discuss challenges and offer solutions

SOUTH YORKSHIRE COVID-19 VOLUNTEER PROGRAMMES

The response to the COVID-19 pandemic has, of course, not been unique to Rotherham and local authorities across the country have had to rapidly establish and implement procedures to provide the necessary assistance to their residents. Volunteer support has been a large part of many of these responses.

Across South Yorkshire; Sheffield, Barnsley and Doncaster Councils - and their respective voluntary sector organisations – have developed programmes which are comparative to Rotherham Community Hub and the Rotherham Heroes volunteer activity.

Barnsley Council took a similar approach in the recruitment and deployment of community volunteers. Volunteers were recruited by both Barnsley Council and Voluntary Action Barnsley who worked collaboratively.

Volunteers were asked to fulfil many of the duties Rotherham Heroes carried out including shopping support, prescription collection and befriending. Barnsley did not offer dog walking as one of the support services available.

Sheffield Council and Doncaster Council did not set up a hub offer instead their Voluntary Sectors continued to act as a brokerage service by signposting volunteers to charities and organisations offering coronavirus-related opportunities. Due to this, data relating to the number of volunteers, roles they carried out and methods of communication is not available.

FINDINGS

SUPPORTING ROTHERHAM RESIDENTS

In the 12 months since Rotherham Community Hub was established, volunteers have supported over 1089 households affected by COVID-19 through physical support tasks as well as offering advice and facilitating telephone befriending calls. Without Rotherham Hero volunteers, a strain would have been placed on Council staff and Voluntary and Community Sector organisations to fulfil the needs of the large number of shielding and isolating residents during the pandemic.

As referenced in the Rotherham Community Hub Evaluation, the pandemic has revealed a catalogue of pre-existing support needs from residents that were not being addressed and pre-dated the pandemic. Looking to the future, it highlights that “Consideration should be given to how support can be holistic, sustained, and effectively tackle root issues”. Whilst many of these social and economic support needs will require targeted responses from the Council and other agencies, there is hope that volunteers may be able to continue providing support in the long-term to alleviate some of these pressures. Using an asset-based community development approach will allow communities to harness the skills of its residents to help each other.

There is potential for volunteers to provide ongoing support through:

- individual ‘informal’ support relationships formed during the pandemic
- VCS organisations
- community groups and grass-roots organisations
- Council services e.g. Foodbank

Through feedback, volunteers themselves have also expressed that despite the pandemic being their original catalyst to offer help, they recognise the impact it has had on a personal and regional level (as well as the ‘feel-good factor’ they have experienced) and wish to continue providing support in the future.

FINDINGS

STRENGTHENING RELATIONSHIPS

Internally

For the very nature of its operation, it is essential that Rotherham Council builds and maintains effective relationships both internally and externally. This is a fundamental element of delivering key services and promoting a positive image across the Borough.

Rotherham Community Hub relied initially on the redeployment of officers from across the Council and, although staff were later hired to specifically support this service, ongoing cross-departmental working has been a necessity.

Those working in the Hub and on the Rotherham Heroes programme have expressed how the skills, knowledge and expertise of staff involved have helped ensure that this was an efficient process and how the Council were better placed to deal with the changing environment.

It is hoped that this strengthening of working between services will have created longer term benefits and that these relationships will be advantageous when working on future projects, whether that be rapid emergency responses or day-to-day exercises.

Externally

As noted previously, the Rotherham Heroes programme has relied on the support of Voluntary and Community Sector organisations. Although Rotherham Council has historically worked with many of these partners for a number of years, the severity and urgency of the pandemic meant that communication and collaboration with these organisations had to be more frequent and thorough. This has bolstered the relationships in place and allowed organisations to develop a better understanding of the services that each other offer. This will create a more efficient response going forward, allowing organisations to confidently sign-post residents to the most appropriate service/s.

The programme has also highlighted existing volunteer opportunities available within Voluntary and Community Sector organisations that – although have seen a surge in uptake during the pandemic – will continue to require support in the future. It is hoped that volunteers who have helped in these roles during the last year will continue to do so, even if less frequently.

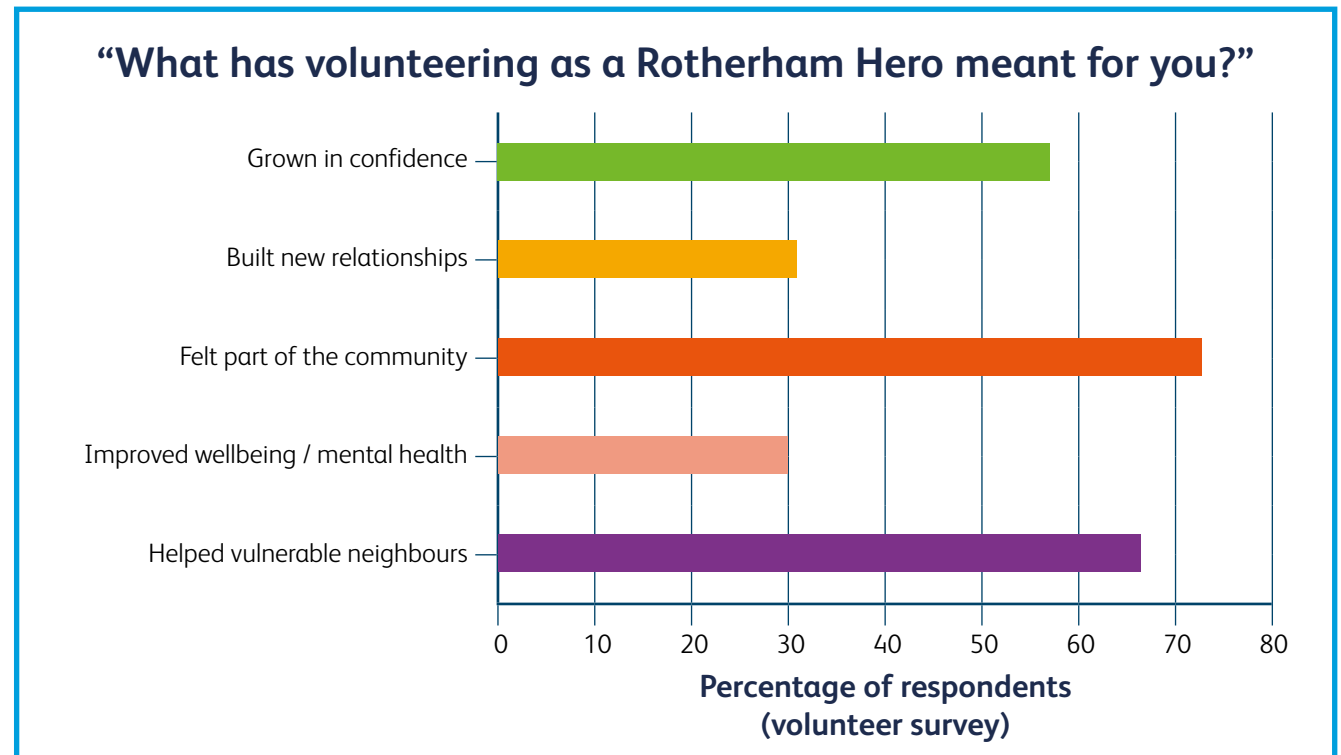
FINDINGS

Communities

As reported locally, nationally and internationally, the pandemic has showcased the overwhelming generosity, willingness and good spirit that exists within communities. Residents have felt compelled to rally together and support their neighbours in the 'fight back' against the pandemic.

In addition to residents having the ability to register as an individual Rotherham Hero, many formed their own mutual aid groups and provided support as a collective. Although some of these were 'pop-up' groups, many intend to continue volunteer activities in the future.

Volunteers have expressed that relationships within their communities has been strengthened and when asked what the experience has meant to them, the majority expressed that it gave them an opportunity to help their neighbours who were shielding or isolating as well as feeling a part of their community.



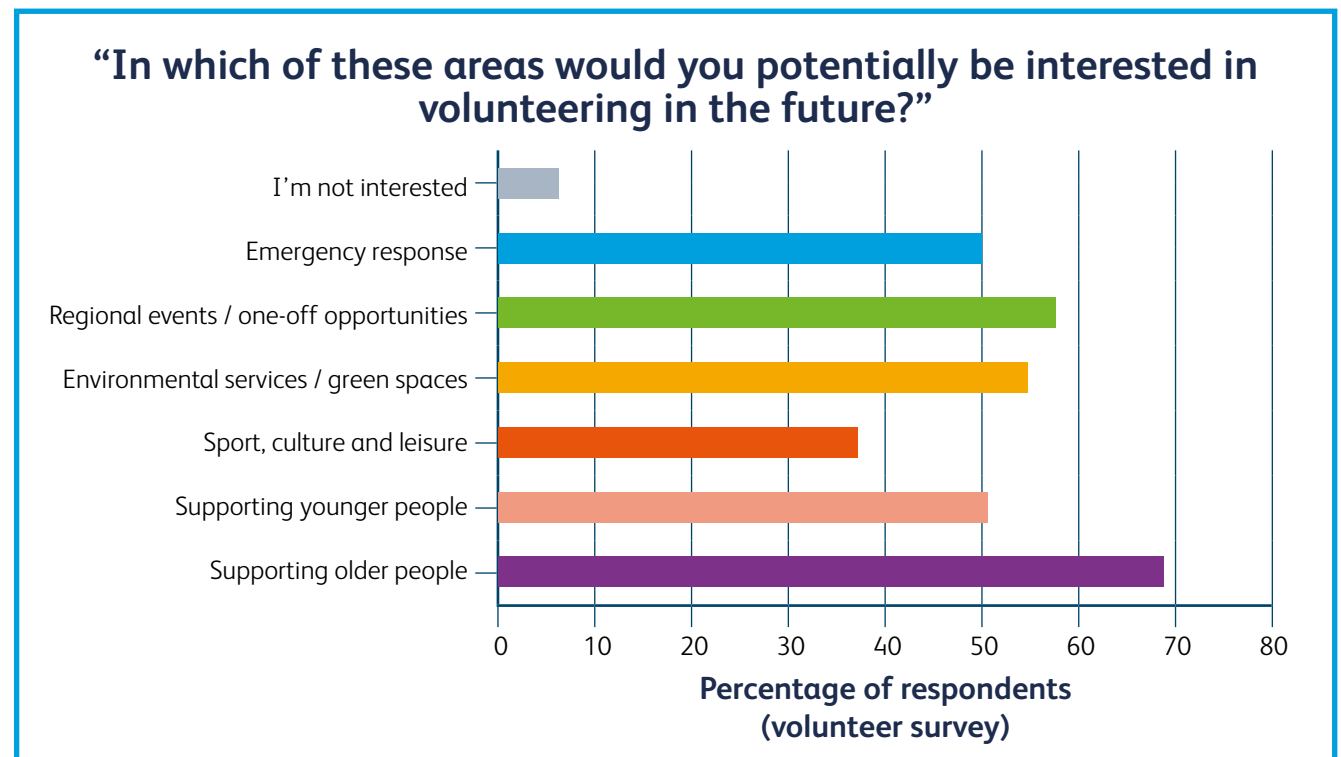
FINDINGS

VOLUNTEERING APPETITE

The programme has highlighted that there is a continued appetite for volunteering in Rotherham. Although 41 per cent of volunteers stated that becoming a Rotherham Hero was their first-time volunteering, >95 per cent stated that they would be interested in undertaking volunteer activities in the future.

Whilst volunteering at Rotherham Council has, historically, been limited to a small number of services, volunteers have expressed greater interest in a wide range of activities including supporting older and younger people, emergency response efforts and environmental services.

The limited information gathered on volunteer demographic (earlier noted) also highlights uptake and interest from a wide age range (18-65+) and from all areas of Rotherham.



CHALLENGES

DBS PROCESSES

Although taking a ‘blanket approach’ in requiring all Rotherham Hero volunteers to complete a Basic DBS criminal check could have proved somewhat advantageous, it was not an effectively executed process. This was largely due to:

- Insufficiently advertising to volunteers that there were no costs involved
- No process for ‘chasing’ incomplete DBS checks

569 volunteers did not go on to provide support as they failed to complete a DBS check.

When analysing the Rotherham Hero volunteer roles, however, there may be argument as to why all volunteers were required to undertake these checks in the first instance. Volunteers were, indeed, providing support to some vulnerable residents and often coming into contact (socially-distanced) on a door-step. For this reason, there was justification for DBS checks to be made on these volunteers. For those volunteers who were not providing this level of support, however, a DBS may not have been a necessity (though this would have reduced the level of flexibility of volunteers moving between roles).

Additionally, it has transpired that some volunteers have, unexplainedly, gone on to undertake duties despite having outdated or even non-existent DBS certificates.

Reflections & Considerations

- Further consideration should have been given as to whether DBS checks were necessary for all volunteers. Prioritising those who were deemed to be undertaking ‘higher risk’ roles would have allowed for a greater number of volunteers to progress as a Rotherham Hero without this mandatory step. This would have also been aided with a clear indication from volunteers – at the time of applying – to what roles they would be interested in and highlighting which would require the DBS check.
- A clear timeframe and process for following up on incomplete DBS applications may have prompted volunteers to complete this step and onboard them to the programme. This may also have clarified the position of the Council in making payment of the check.
- Volunteer DBS check certificates / confirmation should have been securely stored and appropriately checked.

CHALLENGES

MANAGING VOLUNTEER DATA

The discrepancies in data within this report are largely down to the implementation of an insufficient case management system. This was expected and somewhat justified given the urgency and speed in which the response was established, though lessons can be learnt for any similar future responses.

Whilst this database allowed staff to effectively record customer information and update cases accordingly, it had limitations that prevented volunteer data being easily stored, logged and accessed. The functions it did have, however, were not maximised by staff users. A lack of training and consistency resulted in volunteer activity not being recorded in a standardised manner or – in many cases – at all. Technical errors also resulted in volunteer applications being duplicated (often unnoticed) which created additional work to rectify.

Shortfalls in the case management system meant that a large amount of volunteer information was stored on ‘offline’ spreadsheets which were manually updated by Council staff. This was a timely, potentially insecure and often inaccurate method of recording information.

The volunteer application form which fed into this case management system also did not capture enough relevant information to effectively deploy volunteers or aid evaluation activity. At the time of applying, volunteers were not given the opportunity to state the areas that they were willing to provide support in and instead were assumed to only be able to help in their immediate locality. Feedback has highlighted that many volunteers – particularly those with transport – would have been happy to travel across the Borough to meet support needs.

Reflections & Considerations

- An enhanced application form would allow for more detailed information to be obtained from volunteers and would aid evaluation activity. This would have enabled officers to analyse the data and identify trends in volunteer demographic. Understanding potential underrepresented groups would allow targeted recruitment and result in a more diverse programme. Obtaining additional information at the application stage would also have better placed officers to more effectively deploy volunteers.
- Greater training for officers on the case management system would have reduced the risk of inconsistencies in the way that volunteer and customer activity was recorded. Periodic refreshers would have allowed any mis-reporting or discrepancies to be raised.
- Development / procurement of a fit-for-purpose volunteer data management system would allow both volunteers and relevant staff to upload, view and download necessary information in ‘real-time’ and ensure an overall more stream-lined process.

CHALLENGES

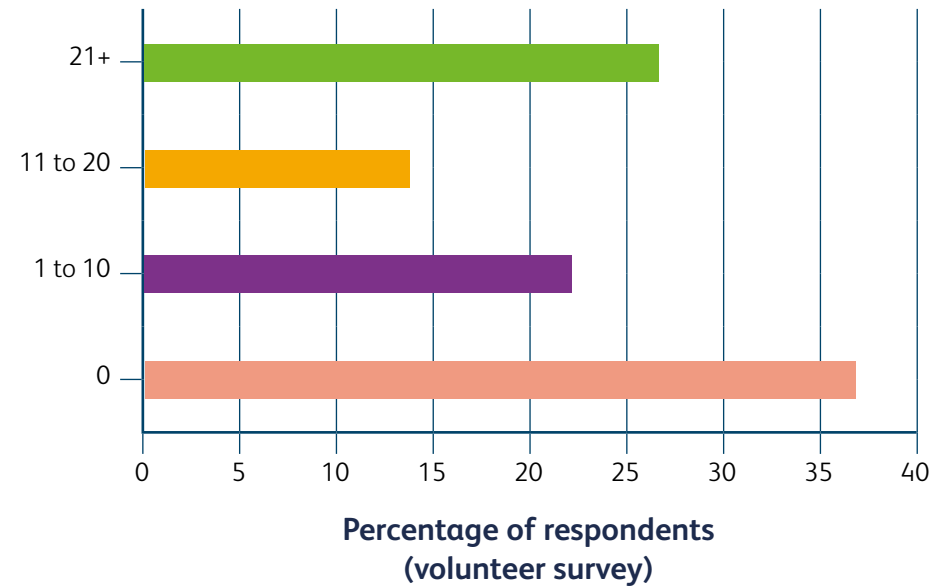
VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT

A widely recognised challenge was that the number of registered Rotherham Heroes outweighed the number of tasks available to them. Whilst this was, to a certain extent, an enviable and successful position for Rotherham Community Hub to be in, it also created frustration amongst volunteers who were not often called upon, if at all. Repeated feedback from volunteers has been the disappointment in wishing to support residents but not being contacted by the Council to do so.

Over 35 per cent of volunteers surveyed stated that they had not yet carried out any volunteering duties as a Rotherham Hero and further comments highlighted that some were unaware if their application had even been received. Conversations with volunteers since, has given the opportunity to explain that volunteer numbers were greater than support requests. Volunteers have been very understanding of this but wished that earlier communications had reflected this. Failing to engage with volunteers properly may lessen their appetite for future volunteering opportunities.

Although the number of support requests and subsequent volunteer tasks were indeed limited, a number of volunteers became regular providers of support. This, of course, showcased their willingness and reliability, however, it resulted in less opportunities for others as council staff often utilised the volunteers they had already built up a relationship with.

“How many occasions would you estimate you have undertaken volunteering tasks?”



Reflections & Considerations

- Improved ongoing communications with volunteers would have made clearer the reasons why not everyone had been contacted to carry out tasks.
- A fairer approach should have been taken in the selection of volunteers to carry out support tasks. This would have been aided by the efficient recording on volunteer activity on a suitable volunteer management system.

FUTURE ASPIRATIONS

VOLUNTEER POLICY DEVELOPMENT

Council services which have previously benefitted from volunteer support have followed self-implemented policies and guidance. The development of a Council-wide Volunteer Policy would ensure that standardised processes are being followed by each service, regardless of volunteer role. Guidelines should clearly set out what constitutes as a volunteer role and how they should be subsequently recruited, managed and supported.

As a basis it should include:

- recruitment and selection process
- volunteer data management
- health & safety and safeguarding procedures

There should also be clear guidelines on specific support including:

- line management and supervision
- training and inductions
- expenses

This written policy should be treated as the main source of information for officers on how to onboard volunteers into their services. It should, however, also be regularly reviewed by Volunteer Coordinators / Human Resources and adapted as necessary based on feedback and any arising challenges.

VOLUNTEER CHAMPIONS

Noted in the policy and an idea to explore, is the implementation of 'Volunteer Champions' across Rotherham Council, whose role would be to promote and encourage the integration of volunteers within their services.

Whilst these 'Champions' would not necessarily act as a volunteer supervisor (though they may, where appropriate), they would become the key point of contact with Volunteer Coordinators, attend relevant workshops and disseminate information amongst their service colleagues. In essence, they would become advocates of Rotherham Council's volunteer programme and work to support its development in their relevant fields and departments. Critically, they would also feedback on the success of the programme, offering recommendations as necessary.

FUTURE ASPIRATIONS

STREAMLINE VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND MANAGEMENT

Developing a simple but effective ‘volunteer journey’ will ensure both volunteers and staff understand the process of onboarding volunteers into the Council.

Volunteer roles should be clearly defined and approved before being advertised on a variety of channels including a dedicated page on the Rotherham Council website, newsletters and via Voluntary Action Rotherham.

Recruitment should be a straightforward process for volunteers and the application stage should capture all the necessary information. Effort should be made to reach Rotherham’s diverse demographic by utilising various channels and connecting with partners across the Borough.

It is important that services and their respective supervisors are also appropriately equipped and trained to manage volunteers and the associated processes. Staff should be re-trained and updated as and when processes are changed.

VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

The success of the entire volunteer process will also be reliant on the development of a fit-for-purpose management system. This system should offer an effective ‘front of house’ portal for volunteers but also efficiently store and manage volunteer data, accessible to relevant Council staff.

Introducing this single volunteer database to manage and centralise volunteer data will:

- eliminate the need for duplicating data recording mechanisms e.g. spreadsheets
- give easier access to an approved bank of volunteers
- be GDPR compliant
- allow for a smoother transition of volunteers between roles and services
- ensure messages and processes relating to volunteer recruitment and vetting (i.e. DBS checks) are clearly communicated and efficiently managed

Potential options for systems should be explored and it should be determined whether existing systems (e.g. CXM, MyHR) can be adapted to manage volunteer data or whether an external system should be procured or commissioned.

At this stage, it is strongly recommended that an external system will be the most effective option as it will incorporate all of the required elements of a Volunteer Management system (e.g. recruitment, advertising of opportunities, database storage, communications etc.) and reduce time required for working and re-working internal systems. Though this option may come at a cost, it will likely be justified given the capabilities the system will have and speed of implementation.

FUTURE ASPIRATIONS

DEVELOPMENT OF ROTHERHAM HEROES AS A BRAND

The 'Rotherham Heroes' name is now widely recognised within Rotherham Council as well as by residents, communities and external organisations. The development of Rotherham Heroes as a brand for future volunteering opportunities within Rotherham Council would not only build a strong image but also aid the development of a post-pandemic volunteer legacy.

There is exciting potential to engage with the large number of volunteers who have been involved in the Rotherham Heroes programme and encourage them to continue to volunteer with the Council through new and existing opportunities. Clear communication and an official 'thank you' should be expressed to the volunteers as pandemic-related opportunities fade out and new opportunities are introduced.

Future development of the brand could incorporate the 'Heroes' name into specific roles e.g. Green Spaces Hero, Library Hero, Environmental Hero etc. though this would be in consultation with marketing and digital teams to ensure a succinct approach.

FUTURE ASPIRATIONS

EXPAND VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Volunteering opportunities within Rotherham Council have historically been dis-jointed and not followed any standardised processes. Whilst some departments are acutely aware that their services rely on the support of volunteers, there are other Council departments which may also benefit from volunteers despite having not yet explored this potential.

As previously highlighted, volunteer feedback has shown interest in a variety of areas, many of which have not regularly been supported by volunteers before. It is recommended that additional volunteer opportunities at Rotherham Council are identified and explored, with ongoing support from the Volunteer Coordinators.

The expansion of volunteering to allow Council staff to participate in activities through an Employee Volunteering Scheme (EVS) should also be developed. This would increase visibility across the Borough, promote a positive Corporate Social Responsibility and achieve mutually beneficial outcomes for the Authority, its staff and the communities supported.

COLLABORATIVE WORKING WITH PARTNERS

In addition to creating an exciting and appealing volunteering offer within Rotherham Council, it is important that strong links are maintained and significant time is spent working with partner organisations to ensure that volunteering is thriving across the Borough as a whole.

As well as welcoming volunteers into the Council, Rotherham Heroes should be actively encouraged and given the opportunity to support local community groups, especially as they start to recover from the effects of the pandemic. Voluntary Action Rotherham (VAR) will be able to support this work on a practical level in advertising roles.

As the Council's volunteer programme is implemented and officers are confident in its operation, focus should be given to the development of a volunteer passport scheme across Rotherham which will allow greater flexibility and uniformity of how volunteers are recruited, onboarded and managed within and between various organisations throughout the Borough.

FUTURE ASPIRATIONS

EXPAND AND IMPROVE VOLUNTEER OFFER

Efforts should be made to expand and improve on the overall offer and experience for volunteers supporting Rotherham Council.

The volunteer programme should be open and easily accessible from recruitment through to deployment. Information should be readily available on the Council website and regular communication with all volunteers will help to increase levels of retention and motivation.

Introducing recognition schemes will help to ensure that volunteers feel valued and appreciated. This could include formally recognising and approving volunteering hours through accredited schemes such as the Duke of Edinburgh and Queen's Awards. Offering incentives and discounts similar to that available to Council staff will help to create an attractive volunteering package. Developing volunteer awards programmes and hosting social events will also allow the Council to officially recognise and thank volunteers for their contributions.

It is also important that efforts are made to build a 'volunteer community' where volunteers have the opportunity to connect with one another and feel part of a wider team. This will help to onboard new volunteers, develop friendships and allow volunteers to communicate and share stories with one another.

Many people get involved with volunteering as a way of advancing their career and employment prospects. The personal development of volunteers at Rotherham Council should be supported and access should be given to training courses as well as signposting to skills and employment services (where appropriate).

SUSTAINABILITY

The role of Volunteer Coordinators throughout the entirety of this process will be to write and support the implementation of the Volunteer Policy, identify new opportunities, overall management of the relevant software / database and assist services in the way they incorporate volunteers into their departments. They will not be expected to take responsibility of the day-to-day management of volunteers as this will fall to each individual service supervisor to lead on.

The current Volunteer Coordinator posts, however, are temporary and due to end on 31 March 2022. Significant consideration must be given to this as it will be incredibly difficult to ensure that the recommendations and aspirations outlined in this report are acted on and sustained without a permanent role/s within the Council.

CONCLUSION

In the 12 months since the UK's first national lockdown, Rotherham's residents have made an unprecedented offer of help. Despite the rapid set-up and implementation of Rotherham Community Hub, volunteers were effectively deployed to meet the needs of the Borough's shielding & isolating residents. The overwhelmingly positive feedback and data relating to the Rotherham Heroes programme highlights the impact it has had on the region's COVID-19 response efforts.

The challenges faced and occasional ineffectiveness of processes should not be surprising given the pace at which the response was developed and the changing external climate. None of these issues were detrimental to the roll out of the programme.

The volunteer programme has benefitted service users, the Council and indeed the volunteers themselves. Volunteers have expressed the positive and rewarding impact it has had on them during what has been incredibly challenging times.

The lessons that have been learnt have strengthened the aspiration to increase and expand the volunteer offer and opportunities available within the Council. Building on the feedback and experiences of the Rotherham Heroes programme will enable the Council to develop a legacy and a sustainable future of volunteering within the authority. It is important now, however, that these lessons are understood and that new policies and procedures are reflective of these.