



Community Links Bromley

Annual Review 2023-24



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Chair's Foreword

Our work in 2023-2024 took place amid significant pressures for the voluntary, community, and social enterprise (VCSE) sector in Bromley. The lingering effects of Covid-19 and the worsening cost-of-living crisis created substantial challenges for households, with local voluntary and community organisations stepping up to meet the growing demand.

Our colleagues at the National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA) worked tirelessly to highlight the role of local infrastructure organisations (LIOs). Their efforts have led to a growing understanding of the importance of LIOs in communities.

Locally, we focused on strengthening VCSE connections with the Integrated Care Board in South East London and worked with the Partnership and sector Alliance to help reshape public health services. We are proud of these achievements, detailed further in the 'Strategy and Delivery' section of this review.

With stable volunteer and staff teams at Community Links Bromley (CLB), we continued to build on years of income growth, securing eight new funding streams. This allowed us to innovate with projects like reducing fuel debt and the Walking Well project, which encouraged walking among local charity staff, trustees, and volunteers. As an organisation, we can look back positively on a year of development.

Looking ahead to 2024-25, we see new opportunities. Nationally, NAVCA will engage in meaningful conversations with key decision-makers and government departments. Locally, we aim to strengthen and champion a thriving VCSE sector in the Borough, ensuring our communities thrive and individuals flourish. We will strive to create a "Culture of Opportunity."

Finally, I want to thank our partners and funders for their support, our members for their contributions, our staff and volunteers for their commitment, and our Board for their strategic vision.



Janet Threlkeld

Janet Threlkeld, Chair of trustees



Achievements and performance

Despite the changed context within which we have operated, our focus remains unchanged.

To support, promote and facilitate the development of a strong, diverse and effective sector in Bromley, we manage and co-ordinate a number of different activities.

They include:

- Information, advice and guidance
- Funding and investment
- Volunteering
- Strategic partnership
- Strategic voice

Information, advice and guidance

We provide the sector with information, advice and guidance to build capacity and support its important role within the community.

This consists of regular news updates, the distribution of a weekly electronic bulletin, and the provision of a dedicated website for the sector.

We remain committed to growing our audience across all communication platforms and we are pleased to report that we have achieved growth on Twitter (X), Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIn.

Achievements include:

- Direct support accessed by **330** unique organisations, a **14.98%** increase on the previous year.
- Social media reach continues to grow.
- Website accessed by **29,278** visitors.
- Simply Connect Bromley accessed by **40,000** visitors.

- Training and capacity building e.g. Cyber Security.
- 13 briefings/seminars and workshops delivered.

We have provided training and support, particularly for smaller and newly formed groups, on a range of topics including governance and trustee support, creating constitutions, writing funding applications, cyber security and advertising services.

330

unique organisations accessed
our direct support

The **Simply Connect Bromley** database is the public facing database of local voluntary sector services, resourced and maintained exclusively by Community Links Bromley.

It provides information on 1,512 services/activities from 658 organisations. The database was accessed by 40,000 visitors last year, and is seen as central to the Borough's award winning Social Isolation and Loneliness programme.



Funding and Investment

Our funding work remains important to ensuring that the sector continues to thrive in Bromley. We undertake horizon scanning and signposting to ensure the sector receives timely information about funding opportunities; provide advice on bid-writing and references for local organisations to fundraising organisations; as well as lead on and facilitate sector-wide bids to attract and secure inward investment into the Borough.

This year, we worked on several collaborative bids, hosted workshops on different funding streams, promoted opportunities and advised charities on their bids.

This resulted in new investment to the sector from 17 different funding streams, including The National Lottery Community Fund, BBC Children in Need, City Bridge Trust, London Youth, Henry Smith Charity, Trust for London, Sport England, The Clothmakers Foundation, The Mercers' Charitable Foundation and The Co-operative Group.

Much of this work is driven by collaborative partnership work, and we are grateful for the support of Transform Bromley Borough (TBB), South East London Community Energy (SELCE), St Edward's Mottingham and the London Borough of Bromley.






We continue to be the Local Trusted Organisation (LTO or accountable body) for the Mottingham Big Local Refocused (MBLR) project. This enables the community to access funding from the Big Lottery Fund to develop and support projects and interventions which meet community priorities.



17

different funding streams

Funding & investment achievements include:

- Worked in partnership on **4** collaborative funding bids 
- Supported **27** unique bids with a **75%** success rate, with six unique funders (Greater London Authority, Children in Need, The Innovation Fund, National Lottery Community Fund, City Bridge Trust and London Youth) 
- Secured **£199,520** new investment into local organisations. Consequently, we are on track to exceed the target of £1.2 million investment into the Borough during the life of the contract, with **£1,136,000** secured to date 
- Managed bids totalling **£862,552** to the Innovation Fund via our Award Force grants management platform (2023-24) 
- Instrumental in the development of the King's College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust 'Volunteering without Barriers' application for **£550,000** 

Award Force grants management platform

To assist with the administration of applications for grant funding, we use the online grants management platform, Award Force. This platform helps save time, reduces costs, and provides a better experience for all programme participants. Since we started using Award Force (in March 2020), the platform has received a total of nearly £5 million in grant applications. Over the past financial year, it received £862,552 in grant applications for the Innovation Fund and MBLR Small Grant Programmes.

Volunteer service achievements include:

- Our brokerage service continues to achieve a high placement rate, with an average **38%** individuals registered with us placed with an organisation



- Worked with **43** organisations to promote active volunteering opportunities



- Distributed **24** volunteering newsletters to **987** volunteers registered with the centre



- Hosted **4** Volunteer Managers Network meetings



- Hosted **4** Volunteering Fairs at various locations: The Walnuts Shopping Centre in Orpington, Queen Adelaide Community Centre in Penge, Motttingham Library in Motttingham, and The Glades in Bromley



- Delivered **3** volunteer management training courses



- A partner to a **£550,000** bid for The Volunteering for Health fund led by King's College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust.



CASE STUDY: Volunteering for Health funding and partnership

In January, a £10 million Volunteering for Health programme was launched. This initiative aims to implement the NHS Volunteering Taskforce's recommendations by developing and testing ideas that utilise volunteering to improve the experience and outcomes for health and care users.

CLB's Director of Voluntary Sector Collaboration for the South East London Integrated Care System (ICS) convened a cross-sector group, inviting 37 providers to shape a local bid for the South East London ICS. We further convened a steering group of local volunteer centres to shape the role of these centres in the bid.

The final bid led by King's College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, consisted of 9 organisations, including Community Links Bromley and two local volunteer centres.

Together, we co-designed a 'Volunteering without Barriers' model, aimed at:

- Better supporting health and care priorities through volunteering.
- Enhancing volunteer experiences.
- Adopting and sharing innovative approaches to recruiting, supporting, and deploying volunteers.

We aim to build a volunteering infrastructure to reduce waste and eliminate duplication, offer diverse opportunities with a 'passport' system for flexible movement across placements, and deploy a single volunteer register to reduce barriers for flexible volunteering.

We are committed to offering opportunities to underrepresented individuals, including people with caring responsibilities, deaf people, people with learning disabilities, migrants and refugees and people from Black, African and Caribbean communities.

Strategic Voice and Partnership

As a service, we strive to enhance the role of the voluntary sector in strategic partnerships throughout the borough and local NHS. This is partly achieved through the Voluntary Sector Strategic Network (VSSN), which engages and influences key borough and multi-borough partnerships, forums, and boards.

We also leverage member intelligence to influence policy and practice.

During the year, we:

- Conducted research into the State of the Voluntary Sector in Bromley.
- Collaborated with the Alliance and VSCE Director to shape the Charter for the Sector/ICS. **This is covered on pages 20 and 21.**
- Partnered with Councils for Voluntary Service (CVS) across SE London ICS areas to map provision and impact, producing a report on the VCSE sector's diverse provision and identifying areas for collaboration and growth. **See case study on page 14.**
- Influenced the South East London Integrated Care System (ICS) Joint Forward Plan and Bromley Local Care Partnership Strategy.

- Collaborated with the Council, MyTime Active, Flock, Your Bromley, and other partners to deliver the High Street Lanes Festival of Sport and Wellbeing, including participating in the Event Officer recruitment panel, engaging voluntary groups, and promoting the event on social media.
- Led the debate on digital inclusion in the Borough by hosting a cross-sector workshop with representatives from Virgin Media, the London Borough of Bromley, and the Head of Digital Programmes. SEL ICS presented along with exemplars from the voluntary sector

We provided sector representation and voice on:

- Health and Wellbeing Board
- Adults Safeguarding Board
- Borough Resilience Forum
- Borough Partnership
- Bromley Business Partnership
- Borough Equalities Partnership Board
- Joint Strategic Needs Assessment Steering Group

Additionally, we participated in the Gypsy, Roma, Traveller Working Group and the forum on Social Isolation and Loneliness.

CASE STUDY: Strategic Partnership

CLB collaborated with South-East London CVS's for the South East London Integrated Care System (SEL ICS) to map provision in the area. Partners included:

- Community Links Bromley
- Community Southwark
- Bexley Voluntary Service Council
- Metro GAVS (Greenwich)
- Lewisham Local
- Integrate CIC (Lambeth)

Together, we produced a report that analysed the current levels of diverse provision within the VCSE sector across the six South East London Boroughs. The report identifies areas for potential collaboration and growth.

The report utilises a framework that focuses on the sector's provision in relation to the five SEL ICS's strategic priorities:

- Prevention & early intervention
- Early years
- Children & young people's mental health
- Adult mental health
- Primary care & people with long term conditions

The report includes:

- Mapping and insights into the current provision of the voluntary and community sector across the six Boroughs.
- Mapping existing networks, forums and connection spaces, and identifying opportunities for growth and further collaboration
- An overview of funding sustainability in the VCSE sector

Developed to address identified issues, the recommendations cover six areas:

- Invest in existing infrastructure
- Increase funding to VCS
- Develop proportionality and accessibility of funding
- Recognise the experience of VCS
- Develop capacity building of local organisations
- Operational support

This work was commissioned by the SE London ICS and funded by the NHS Development Programme

Projects

As a dedicated second tier charity, we deliver a range of impactful projects and this year was no different with our Walking Challenge, our support to the Nottingham Big Local Refocused project to help their community development programme, and targeted efforts to address local fuel poverty.

SGN Safe and Warm scheme

We were successful with our bid to SGN to provide personalised energy advice to vulnerable households.

The aim of the programme and grant from the Centre for Sustainable Energy was to deliver a local Bromley based SGN Safe and Warm Scheme to support people struggling with the current cost of living crisis and energy price cap increases.

We worked with partners the South East London Community Energy cooperative (SELCE), St Edwards Mottingham and Transform Bromley Borough (TBB) to deliver support on the ground at various locations around the borough.

440

homes supported through SGN Safe and Warm Scheme

This support included personalised energy advice (e.g. energy efficiency behaviour change), energy efficiency measures and energy schemes, Priority Services Register sign ups, benefits eligibility checks and debt advice, energy crisis support (fuel vouchers or emergency funding) and other crisis support (e.g. food, clothing or housing), and carbon monoxide safety awareness advice.

As a partnership we delivered:

- Sessions at nine different sites in Bromley
- Support to over 440 homes (target was set at 265 homes)
- An estimated benefit to those supported is in excess of £50,000

Further proposals have been submitted to roll this programme out in 2025/26.



CASE STUDY: SGN Safe and Warm Scheme

"As the Christ Church community fridge in Orpington where we have one of our energy cafes, I met a client whose mother has a cold uninsulated home and large arrears with her energy bills. He was supporting his mother to pay off the arrears, which was costing him £350 per month and forcing him to come and use the community fridge to supplement his food shopping. The arrears had been caused by the client's late father who had severe dementia. He would turn the heating up to 30 degrees, even in summer, as he believed he was cold, causing a large amount of energy to be consumed and making the bills very high. At the same time, they had a faulty smart meter so British Gas (their supplier) was using estimates for their bills. When British Gas came to fix and do a read of the meter it was much higher than their estimates, leading to a debit of over £3000 on their next bill.

A referral was made to Debt Free London so that the client could make an application for debt relief from the British Gas Energy Trust, as I believed there was a good case that could be put forward showing that the debt was caused by mental incapacitation and was having a large impact on the client and his mother. The client was very pleased about this referral as he did not know that there were grants out there that may be able to help him. He is currently in the process of making this application on behalf of his mother.

Furthermore, I identified the client's mother as eligible for a 50% discount from Thames Water for her water bill, helping her save potentially £200 a year as well as making sure she was already signed up for the Priority Services Register. The client was delighted with these potential savings. After investigating what the energy efficiency rating was for his mother's property, I identified that it was likely she would be eligible for grant funding for energy efficiency improvements to her home. I referred him to a contractor who does ECO funded work and signposted him to the Great British Insulation scheme website, so that he could make an application for his mother's property.

Overall, he was very happy with the range of services offered and the referrals made for his mother, as he would not have known about any of the support if he had not visited us at the energy café."

Bromley Walking Challenge

Funded by a Bromley Innovation Fund grant, we piloted an approach to improve health and wellbeing amongst staff, trustees and volunteers from the voluntary sector in Bromley. We aimed to achieve this by increasing walking, jogging or running amongst 120 participants from 20 local charities. We are delighted to report that we smashed the target, engaging 168 people organised into 30 teams!

We ran two challenges, a pre- and post-Christmas event. Our first six week Bromley Step Challenge included 64 participants. Burlington Wanderers led the way and walked 2,837.6 km (1,763.2 miles) over the period. Overall, the 64 participants in the Challenge covered 14,237 km, which amounted to 20.6 million steps.

Our second challenge lasted 12 weeks with 168 participants from 30 teams. They covered the extraordinary distance of 81,838.9 km (50,852.3 miles) with 117.4 million steps logged.

117.4m

Total steps logged in Bromley New Year Walking Challenge

75%

experienced physical and mental health benefits



Our congratulations to all participants, including three teams who completed the challenge and covered the equivalent distance across Europe from Istanbul in Turkey to Santiago de Compostela in Spain. Home instead Bromley took first place, followed closely by Burlington Wanderers and CareDogs.

An average of over 1.4 million steps were taken every day.

The feedback from the teams was very positive with many reporting that the Challenge provided the motivation to be more active during the colder weather, as well as helping colleagues and neighbours to bond. 89% of participants said they walked further over the period.

The following impacts were reported:

- **Health and Wellbeing:** 75% of participants experienced physical and mental health benefits.

- **Community Engagement:** Strengthened bonds among colleagues and neighbours
- **Sustained Activity:** 85% of participants intended to continue the increased activity.
- **Environmental Impact:** As a result of participation numbers in the second challenge, 33 trees were planted.

The challenge concluded with a celebratory event (bowling) at The Pavilion Leisure Centre, highlighting the community spirit and achievements of all participants. Thanks to Mytime Active for hosting us and to all the Challenge participants.

Mottingham Big Local Refocused

Big Local gave 150 neighbourhoods £1 million in National Lottery funding, including Mottingham. Unlike other funding programmes, Big Local comes with a remarkable amount of leeway in how to use the money. In short, it can fund whatever is most important to the partnership.

But Big Local is coming to an end, and much of the focus during the year has been on how we can establish a lasting legacy and keep the activities growing. It was also about ensuring that we commit and utilise its resource for the final years of the funding.



The year also saw new staff members joining the team, new residents joining the Partnership, events, coach trips, grants programmes and improved communication and engagement with residents. We also worked with a new Interim Chair, John Westby, and our thanks go to him for navigating us through this hectic period for the Partnership.

During the year we also developed a new mini plan and made a series of bold commitments.

They were:

- To host six community lunches.
- To fund 18 days of summer of sports to engage young people.
- To turn on the Christmas lights.
- To have summer and winter coach trips.

These were delivered in full, alongside the established large grants programme. All this was promoted with improved communications and engagement locally. Mottingham Big Local Refocused (MBLR) also delivered an International Women's Day Celebration in addition to the plan.

The Motingham 2024-2026 Big Local plan was made with help from design, technology and research studio, Interrobang. The aim is to build upon achievements and work towards a sustainable legacy. The Plan was the result of extensive local consultation undertaken by MBLR's staff members and Interrobang. MBLR's success has been increasingly due to working in partnership with a range of organisations to deliver provision, and this is seen as fundamental to the way ahead.

Through research and consultation with residents, the partnership has chosen seven community needs that they think should be the focus. These needs are wide-ranging and interconnected and they will not be solved in isolation. The needs of focus are:

- Children and young people
- Older people
- Ethnic minorities
- Employability
- Economic empowerment
- Health and wellbeing
- Green space

This plan is about building foundations.

This work would not have been possible without a wide range of residents and professionals being generous with their time, expertise, and feedback.



Special thanks are also due to the Motingham Big Local Refocused partnership board that served during the year: Steven Maddar, Jenny Millen, Claudine Williams, Ian Williams, Doreen Thompson, Joel Willis, Marion Lakah, Sue Turner, and Robert Brooks.

They were supported by the Chair, John Westby, staff members Karyn Jones, Gavin Maynard, Rhiannon Ashley, and Local Trust representatives, Ezra Gill and Carl Adams.

The research was led by Ashley O'Callaghan, with Sarah Tayleur, Nandita Rath, and Jaye Hackett.

The Partnership is coming to the end of the MBLR journey and they look forward to leaving a lasting inclusive legacy that can respond to local needs as the community's changes and its population becomes more diverse.

The plan documents, budgets and consultation can be found at plan.motinghamblr.com.

Integrated Care System and the Voluntary Sector

Community Links Bromley hosts Tal Rosenzweig, Director of Voluntary Sector Collaboration & Partnerships (SE London ICS). She reports to the South East London Voluntary Sector Alliance, which brings together the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector across the area.

Our Director has been instrumental in driving key initiatives and securing substantial funding to support the sector across the area.

Despite financial challenges, she has continued to leverage funding to sustain sector activities and has worked on providing free or reduced-rate access to NHS estates for VCSEs.

She has led on the development and implementation of the SEL VCSE Charter, secured £600,000 for capacity building, ensuring grassroots organisations receive the support they need, and £130,000 for strategic representation.

The Charter/memorandum focuses on four key areas of change:

- The sector as an equitable strategic partner
- Sustainable and fair funding
- Reducing bureaucracy and supporting sector innovation
- Strengthening the sector's infrastructure

£600,000

secured for capacity building

The work Tal, the Alliance and ICS have been carrying out in South East London, and the development of the Charter, is attracting a lot of attention across the country, and as a result Tal presented to NAVCA's Health & Wellbeing Forum in August. This resulted in a number of people from ICSs across the country asking for a follow up conversation to support with their systems undertaking similar work.

Additionally, Tal has led the VCSE Alliance in setting strategic priorities, enhancing internal structures, and developing a cohesive brand identity.

She has also overseen the completion of a comprehensive SEL mapping report, contributed to widening participation in the health and care workforce, and supported the development of a Creative Health Impact Tool to measure the benefits of creative activities on health and wellbeing. Their efforts in organising community events further demonstrate their commitment to fostering community engagement and collaboration.

SEL VCSE Charter Implementation:

- Worked with ICB executives to secure and allocate funding across boroughs for 2024-25 resulting in £600,000 for capacity building support for grassroots VCSEs across South East London.
- Collaborated with 6 CVSs, grassroots VCSEs, and Place executive leads to develop funding guidelines.
- Secured £130,000 for VCSE strategic representation and identified key spaces for VCSE involvement.
- Progressed free/reduced rate access to NHS estates for VCSEs and explored broader community access.

VCSE Alliance:

- Conducted a development session to set strategic priorities for the next two years.
- Focused on internal development to enhance Alliance structures and processes.

SEL Mapping and Opportunities:

- Commissioned a report by Lewisham Local and the 5 CVSs, highlighting key themes and opportunities for each borough.
- Prepared and presented the findings to the ICB board and executives.

Health Education England funding (Widening Participation in Health & Care Workforce):

- Concluded the project with partners, presenting findings and co-created solutions to the SEL Anchor Alliance.

Creative Health Impact Tool Development:

- Supported the development of an impact tool to measure the effect of creative VCSE activities on health and wellbeing.
- Facilitated workshops to further develop the tool for broader sector use.

These achievements highlight the pivotal role played to secure funding, fostering collaboration, and enhancing the impact of VCSEs in the community.



CASE STUDY: Health Education England (HEE) Anchor Programme

Community Links Bromley is the accountable body for the South East London ICS Health Education England (HEE) Anchor Programme investing £250,000 in SE London voluntary and community sector organisations, including Bromley based charities.

The aim of the HEE funding is widening participation in the health and care workforce and focuses on a range of excluded communities including refugees and migrants, deaf communities, and carers. (The carers element is being led by BTSE).

Work under the HEE funding is progressing well, and seven provider organisations have completed their co-identification of barriers into accessing work in health and care by their communities.

We are holding three joint reflection spaces with all delivery partners, where partners share their approaches, insight gathered, and work together to overcome any barriers.



Budget, Finance and Funding

We are a lean organisation and continue to work hard to keep costs within budgets at a time of growing cost pressures. At the same time, we have also worked hard to secure external investment to support the delivery of services to our sector. As highlighted above, this work resulted in substantial investment in the Nottingham area, as well as investment from the GLA, the Innovation Fund, and SGN to develop and deliver other projects.

We continue to obtain our core funding from the London Borough of Bromley. However, we remain committed to diversifying our sources of funding, and are pleased that this year, we secured funds from eight different funding sources.

It is essential to recognise that the core funding enabled us to secure over 80% of our funding in 2023/24 from other sources. Overall income increased from £702,121 to £859,412.



As a service, we are extremely aware of the financial pressures experienced by our funders and, as such, the trustees want to thank our core funders, the London Borough of Bromley, for their continued support.

The strategy of our organisation continues to be to seek core funding from the local authority and to enable on-going development through project funding from large funders such as the Big Lottery and charitable trusts.

Our aim is to ensure that we can give confidence to stakeholders that the charity's finances are being well managed.

Year ending	2023/24	2022/23
Income Resources	£859,412	£702,121
Resources Expended	£849,367	£573,226
Net income	£10,045	£128,895

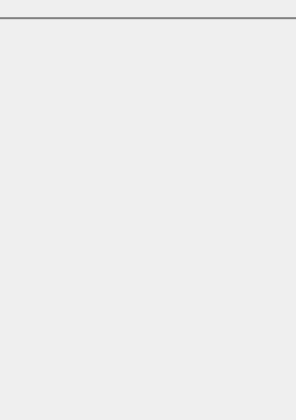
Looking ahead - 24/25: Future Developments

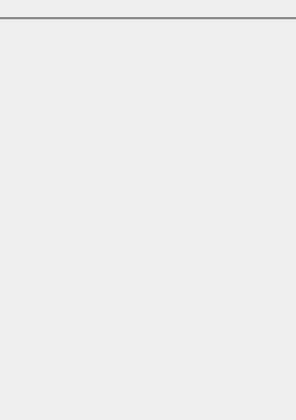
Our financial performance over recent years has allowed us to build our reserves to a healthy level. We will continue to build on this sound foundation.

Key developments planned for the year ahead include:

- **Develop** and agree an ambitious 5-year Strategic Development Plan
- **Prepare** systems and evidence to obtain NAMCA Local Infrastructure Organisation Quality Accreditation - The LIQA
- **Continue** to grow and diversify income streams
- **Publish** our State of the Sector Bromley Report and develop an implementation action plan
- **To** review our membership model and strive to create an organisation lead by and for the sector
- **Continue** to develop our service model to create a "Culture of Opportunity" for the sector and volunteers







Our Staff

Christopher Evans, Chief Executive

E: christophere@communitylinksbromley.org.uk | T: 0208 315 1903

Steve Smith, Funding and Development Officer

E: fdo@communitylinksbromley.org.uk | T: 0208 315 1919

Fay Millen, Volunteer Development Manager

E: faym@communitylinksbromley.org.uk | T: 0208 315 1930

Tal Rosenzweig, Director of Voluntary Sector Collaboration & Partnerships
(SE London ICS)

E: talr@communitylinksbromley.org.uk | T: 07932 417076

Amie Winter-Jackson, Voluntary Sector Collaboration & Partnerships Business
Support Officer

E: alliance@communitylinksbromley.org.uk | T: 07376 950332

Rhiannon Ashley, Mottingham Big Local Refocused Programme Manager

E: manager@mottinghamblr.com | T: 07512 334649

Gavin Maynard, MBLR Administrator and Project Support Officer

E: admin@mottinghamblr.com | T: 07593 443416

Alexandra Doust, Office Manager

E: alexd@communitylinksbromley.org.uk | T: 0208 315 1902

Kathryn Mitchell, Web and Digital Assistant

Our Thanks

We are indebted to the support of our volunteers, so a big thanks to those that supported us during the financial year:

Peter Castledine, Julia Knox, Angela Morgan, Vandana Chhatwal

