

The Christchurch Conversation Report 2023



Working together to end social isolation

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1. Executive Summary

- a) The second Christchurch Conversation demonstrated an even greater need and desire for partnership working particularly given the learning from Covid, and the ongoing cost of living crisis leading to even fewer resources being available to support the most vulnerable and marginalised in our community.
- b) It showed that there are a significant number of groups and organisations, including social enterprise, local charities and trusts, and public and private sector organisations, running a wide range of activities, but it was evident that there is still both duplication and gaps in provision.
- c) The top 3 issues identified in the pre-event survey were **financial hardship, loneliness and isolation and mental health,** all of which were exacerbated by the Covid pandemic and the accompanying lockdowns.
- d) Other issues included lack of youth provision, social isolation (particularly but not exclusively, amongst the elderly), lack of community transport (particularly for our elderly residents), homelessness, food insecurity, the need for a town centre community hub, and communication; both between organisations, and with residents, in terms of knowing what is available and how to access it.
- e) The **lack of youth provision** featured again in all the discussion groups, and it is proposed to reschedule the **Youth Conversation**, postponed from 2020, for later this year or early 2025. It is essential for this to include the young people themselves, as well as the organisations and agencies working with them.
- f) **Social isolation and loneliness** were also high on the list of priority issues and whilst some progress has made in addressing these, there is still much to do. Examples of new initiatives included the CCP using their transport to get isolated elderly residents to a local Lunch Club; addressing both food insecurity and social isolation, and the Food Bank's provision of a weekly Community Meal. The national Warm Spaces initiative in response to the huge increase in energy costs, has also been a positive development, with a few local churches hosting a weekly 'drop in', and sometimes offering a light lunch.
- g) Access to transport was identified as a significant barrier for many of our older residents in getting to the activities that were available, and it was felt that more partnership working between the community transport schemes should be encouraged. Again, some progress has been made, with the CCP and SEDCAT working together to ensure residents can still get to medical appointments, as well as expanding transport for social/support groups.
- h) It is also worth noting that since the **2018 Conversation** Christchurch has become part of the much larger **BCP Council**, but that Christchurch also has a **Town Council** which is very keen to work with the community in identifying its priorities and working together towards achieving them.

2. Introduction

The first Christchurch Conversation, held in 2018, demonstrated that there was an appetite for increased partnership working within local organisations. This first event was primarily to identify the gaps in community provision and to address them collaboratively; the aim being to improve the quality of life for all residents. The main issues identified at the time were social isolation, lack of provision for young people, community transport, housing and homelessness, mental health problems and a lack of resources all round. The event also identified the need to create a 'community hub' in the town centre. The hope was that this would solve some of the communication challenges whilst providing a 'one stop' information hub. Ideally this would be supported by many of the local organisations/agencies working with the community in Christchurch.

From the 2018 Conversation, a Steering Group was created, drawn from various participating organisations. This group was tasked with taking forward several of the main issues identified. In support of this group, several Task and Finish groups were also set up to look at some of the flagged priorities. Those identified to initially be addressed were poor inter-organisational communications, absence of a Community Hub, a need to improve youth engagement, a need to address social isolation and to recognise and help those with mental health issues. A Youth Conversation, involving many organisations working with children and youth was diarised for 2020.

Sadly, the pandemic then interrupted both the planned Youth Conversation and much of the project work started by the Steering Group and the Task and Finish groups, also making it impossible to hold the second Conversation planned for 2020. However, from the 2018 Conversation there were some great examples of collaborative working, including a networking event held at Christchurch Priory which not only showcased all the organisations working in Christchurch to the public, but also presented an invaluable opportunity for networking and relationship building between them. That original Conversation also laid a good foundation for partnership working across Christchurch during the Covid pandemic and provided the motivation for the second Conversation in October 2023. This aimed to both harness the learning from the pandemic, and to further develop that appetite for collaborative working by focusing on the question:

"How can we work together to continue to build a connected community in Christchurch, both celebrating the work that's already happening while recognising the challenges and opportunities ahead of us".

This second Christchurch Conversation took place in October 2023 and was held at the GodFirst building in Airfield Way. The venue was ideal, offering a large open café space which enabled attendees to mix and network on arrival, facilitated by 'connectors', whilst enjoying refreshments. The adjoining auditorium then provided the perfect platform for the panel presentations, and for the subsequent table discussions, also facilitated by table 'hosts'.

The event opened with a panel of 4 representatives from different organisations working within Christchurch who introduced themselves and discussed their work within the community. They highlighted both the challenges and opportunities each organisation faced in their everyday work and the benefits of working in partnership with others. The hosts of the event then asked all attendees to turn to those sharing their tables and engage in facilitated group discussions. Each table was asked to consider what was working well and what was not, within their organisation, which was followed by a short Q & A session with the panel.

Tables were then encouraged to imagine what the future could look like, and some of the steps that might be taken to get there. All notes from these discussions were captured by the table hosts and were used as the basis for the statistical analysis and discussions within this document. The Conversation was attended by 97 individuals representing 45 organisations drawn from the VCSE (voluntary, community and social enterprise), statutory, business and faith sectors all working in Christchurch (Appendix 1) and a follow up questionnaire was then sent out to all attendees, the results of which are also included in this report. A press release was included in the Bournemouth Echo (Appendix 2)

3. Preparation

For the CCII, the hosts, Christchurch Community Partnership (CCP) issued invitations to a wide range of organisations, large and small from all the sectors working across Christchurch, as well as funders and elected members and officers from the local authority. The invitation included a registration link redirecting the invitees to a brief questionnaire organised by the Dorset Community Action (DCA). Invitees were asked to briefly advise the main issues they saw in their daily work. Early data collection identified certain themes and was helpful in shaping the event.

That initial questionnaire elicited over 60 responses. The main issues represented were financial hardship, social isolation and loneliness and mental health. Respondents commented that often the issues faced by the people they worked with were very complex. These are some of the comments posted:

"We see loneliness and isolation ... and lack of knowledge of what is available to them within their areas. This is quite often due to very little social interaction... or access to online resources. Those who (have financial issues) aren't getting the support or being offered freely information regarding benefits and allowances that they are entitled to."

"Carer stress, social isolation, financial hardship, long waiting lists for people needing support from Social Services and other support organisations."

"Loneliness, isolation and low-income households who aren't aware of benefits and support available to them, often because they have no access to digital means."

Other issues that arose included crime, inequality, changing demographics (aging population), bereavement, lack of access to green spaces and environmental issues.

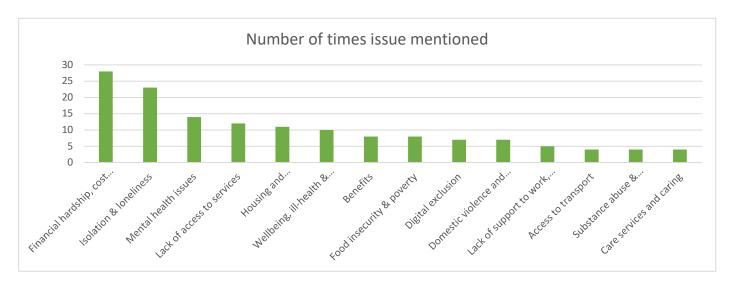


Figure 1: Pre-event survey of the issues seen in the work of participants.

4. The Event

Introduction

CCP host, Rev Sandra Prudom introduced the event, and her co-host, Alistair Doxat-Purser gave a short introduction as to the purpose of the evening. The emphasis was on the importance of working together as organisations, and as a community, for the benefit of all, so that residents could be more effectively supported and informed. The attendees, assisted by the table hosts, were then asked to consider the following question, using the guided discussion points:

"How do we work together to continue to build a connected community in Christchurch?"

- How do we collaborate and break down barriers to working together. The 2018 conversation set us up to work together over Covid (this demonstrated how connected communities can work effectively together).
- This is of benefit to residents so they know that if they talk to one organisation, that will open the opportunity to get help from other places because organisations are working together and aware of what others do.
- Celebrating the work that's already happening while recognising the challenges and opportunities ahead of us.

To encourage openness and debate, co-host Alistair asked if those prepared to use the microphone and happy to address the room, would provide examples of challenges and solutions they currently applied to everyday issues. The attendees were especially encouraged to provide examples of where organisations were already collaborating. A good example given was that of the Food Bank and CCP working together to provide and deliver hot meals to families and individuals during Covid lockdowns.

Panel discussion

To stimulate further the table discussions, the panel of guests were invited to talk about their roles, focussing on issues encountered during the Covid pandemic particularly the effect this had on social isolation and food insecurity and the current cost of living crisis. For greater insight on these issues, particularly amongst older residents CCP/Bournemouth University and BCP Council participated in a research project and the results can be found here: Hidden Hunger Report

Daisy Carr, BCP's lead for the Access to Food network, talked about her role with this initiative set up in 2020 and further developed during the pandemic to address food insecurity across the BCP conurbation and which has brought together a wide range of organisations involved in meeting needs around food across BCP – Access to Food Report

Jae Harris, Director of Somerford Youth & Community Centre talked about his work with children and young people, and their families across Christchurch, particularly the community in Somerford, and the challenge of engaging youth with so little provision made for them in Christchurch. He also highlighted the increased need for the People's Pantry, also operating from SYCC, particularly given the current cost of living crisis where many families, even with both parents working are struggling to make ends meet.

Clir Viv Charrett, current Christchurch Town Council Mayor, talked about the Town Council and its role following the formation of BCP Council and the opportunities for engagement it gave residents. She also highlighted the need for a community hub in the town centre to improve communications and provide other needed facilities for the town and encouraged all present to work with the Town Council to continue to improve the quality of life for all residents.

Heather Olive, BCP's lead for Age Friendly Communities, gave a definition of AFC as "places that enable people to age well and live a good later life". She described how an 'Age Friendly Network' of community groups, leaders, councils, businesses and older residents all work together to identify and make changes in both the physical and social environments. This includes improving transport, outdoor spaces, volunteering and employment, leisure and community services. BCP is one of only 3 pilot schemes for AFC, currently running in the UK.

Each panel member discussed both the challenges experienced and the opportunities they saw for building better connections in their own areas of work. They were asked about the need to develop relationships with other organisations and how best to facilitate a more collaborative working environment. This initiative then led on to discussions around the tables where participants were asked to imagine the future and some of the steps needed to achieve their vision of it.

Table discussions

We asked participants to gather around the tables in their groups to get everyone thinking in a practical way by considering the following questions:

Imagining the future

It's the future; we've been working together through the good times and the difficult to create a really connected Christchurch:

- What does it look/sound/feel like?
- How are you linking with others? What does a day look like for you (or your organisation)? What does it look like for the local community?

This produced the list of aspirations below:

- Seamless life journey for children through support
- Apprenticeships with local businesses & young enterprise
- Happy fulfilled young people, self-supporting, self-respecting
- No need for Foodbanks
- Warm furnished housing for those fleeing domestic abuse
- Support for young carers
- Affordable accommodation
- Elimination of stigma around getting support
- No more retirement homes
- Improved mobility and getting out and about for older generation.
- More provision for the homeless

Consideration was given to how some of these might be supported in terms of changes to the statutory sector infrastructure such as:

- Free parking for 1h in Christchurch
- Easy access to GPs and services
- Good public transport
- Make decisions based on needs
- Move to bottom upwards decision making not top down
- Continuity of service provision

Groups also discussed how the work of the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector might be improved and better resourced as it is a crucial part of support to the community. Suggestions included:

- Sustainable funding streams
- An increase in the capacity of community transport (e.g. SEDCAT and CCP services)
- Longer term approach to strategy/funding/partnerships
- Integrated community organisation infrastructure
- Avoid duplication, more collaboration between organisations

This was again followed by brief feedback to the room from the table hosts via a roving mic.

Steps to get there

Groups were then asked to consider the following questions:

- What are the practical things we can do to get us closer to this vision?
- What's already happening that we can build on?

Several overlapping themes emerged – and these were confirmed in follow-up work:

<u>Communication</u> Working together we can lead on changing the narrative:

"Communication between the top and the bottom (of the community) needs to change".

- More positive expressions staying well
- Warm, welcoming & positive
- Non-judgemental, looking after each other
- Less stigma around mental health & drug issues
- Young people, valued as an asset, but not necessarily identified as such
- More good news stories
- Create sense of being socially responsible
- More dementia & family support awareness
- Less stigma around actually asking for support
- Include the younger generation in conversations
- Include carers, tell their stories
- Restore pride in community, culture & local attractions
- Communications between generations need to improve
- Take more time to get to know people
- Intergenerational working, to bring generations together

<u>Communications and media</u> Suggested practical changes that could be made:

"Remove barriers to communications; how do individuals prefer to be contacted?"

"Lack of joined up thinking across the agencies."

- Being able to contact someone within an agency who is familiar with a specific person or family.
- Share resources & contacts (between VCSE organisations)
- Establish how people would like to be contacted
- Remove technology as a barrier digital exclusion
- Link voluntary/statutory/health/housing organisations
- Lack of communication isolation- transport
- Make better use of resources Mudeford Mag, information buses, billboards, newsletters, community magazines, press
- Make social media & websites more interactive
- Professionalise communication, invest in marketing & comms
- Improve general media use to break down barriers
- Making sure the public are aware of the services available to them
- Access to information, engaging vulnerable adults, communications.

<u>Community directory</u> It was felt that having a central resource could be transformative, but it was acknowledged that such an initiative would be difficult to accomplish.

Comment received: "Cinder? Like Community Tinder .."

- Been talked about for years, where is it?
- Make sure people know where to go for help
- Directories are not sustainable need something permanent like info hub
- Single directory for carers CAN (Community Action Network) are building one
- The PCN (Primary Care Network) have also built a health directory
- Digital service directory to support local directory
- Directory of who's who? Voluntary groups, services, including health
- Central database for health services & volunteering

<u>Community Hub</u> Creating a shared community space was again a very popular idea. It was thought that such a resource could have multiple uses:

"... a centre of advice/knowledge sharing, support, social, intergenerational, holistic mental and physical wellbeing for all ages and social backgrounds"

"... somewhere to hold and display all the voluntary activities in one place."

- cookery unit/food club/ holiday food club
- youth centre
- mentoring/role modelling/guidance, promoting trust
- financial advice
- drop in health services
- drug/alcohol advice
- community family suppers/family connections

- central information point
- wellbeing one stop shop
- small treatment rooms
- Christchurch Angels/CCP office
- space for carers/volunteers to meet
- Exercise classes for older generations/dementia sufferers
- Space for provision of help with IT issues
- Meeting space and hot desk facilities

Funding: Ideas around how this might be sustained also emerged:

- allocate more funds to improving communications (online comms)
- make funding applications more straightforward
- Councils (BCP/CTC) need to fund gaps
- get the funders connected and talking, more discourse
- consider multi-year grants
- more unrestricted grants
- community led strategies

Afterwards, we asked everyone to summarise what the main themes on their table were and similar themes emerged, plus a strong view that the VCSE needed to work co-operatively:

- Communication and service awareness
- A desire to connect with multi agencies and services
- Cooperation/joined up working
- Community hub spaces, keeping the energy going
- Without the volunteer groups the BCP would not be able to meet its legal requirements
- Joining up the dots with certain charities; awareness of what/who is 'out there' and what they are doing/contributing to making life better for certain age groups/distinct groups of people
- The need for a directory of all the services, groups and help in Christchurch
- Improve people's wellbeing, e.g. more affordable/social housing, community directory, community hub to provide info and integration.
- An awareness of the services provided for Christchurch residents by agencies and organisations
- Awareness of what other groups were doing
- Communication and helping support others

"Opportunities for people to meet and get to know each other's work"

[&]quot;The need for organisations to work together"

5. Follow Up Questionnaire

In order to explore the emerging themes from the discussions, a follow-up questionnaire was sent to all attendees. All the respondents agreed that it was a valuable event and both the venue and timing worked really well.

A series of questions were asked to expand on what had emerged from the table discussions:

What would you say are the major gaps in provision currently?

Based on the thinking about what development is needed, we asked in more detail about the gaps that people perceived.

They saw gaps in social provision:

- Linking transport to groups needing it
- Suitable housing
- The irrelevance of provision, lack of reality and practical responses related to actual needs on the ground. Well-meaning but ineffectual.
- Working with men
- Unified work with the elderly
- Not everyone is on the Internet to find out information, would be helpful for a representative to knock on people's door to have a face-to-face conversation to identify their needs.
- Instant help: mental health, available financial resources

Several people mentioned facilities for young people:

- Youth activities/support
- More support for the youth in Christchurch.
- Resources for young people
- Upskilling and keeping the newly trained in the area
- Youth provision across the wider Christchurch area.
- Youth Work

A theme **of improving the local voluntary, community and social enterprise infrastructure** also emerged:

- Professional communication skills across the voluntary sector
- Staff and funding
- Funding is currently insufficient
- More people to contact and befriend those who are isolated and show support
- Some kind of 'organic' directory knowing who is doing what and what exactly exists already out there in Christchurch and the surrounding area.
- More effective working together, we can probably all help each other but don't even know about each other
- Not so much a gap in provision, but more about a knowledge of the provision available.
- Joined up thinking and awareness of what is being done
- Knowledge of all organisations / lack of a database/directory
- We have a vast array of services locally but getting their existence out to those that help is not happening

Part of this was the identified need for a "one stop shop" (community hub)

- There is a lack of service awareness which would be helped by a community venue
- A lack of a one stop shop/hub in the community
- A hub is needed
- Community space for meetings/events/lack of funding
- No "centre" of excellence and help available as yet.

Which two things would improve communication between organisations and the wider community?

Building on this thinking, we explored how communications could be improved. Some 36 respondents prioritised the given options as follows:

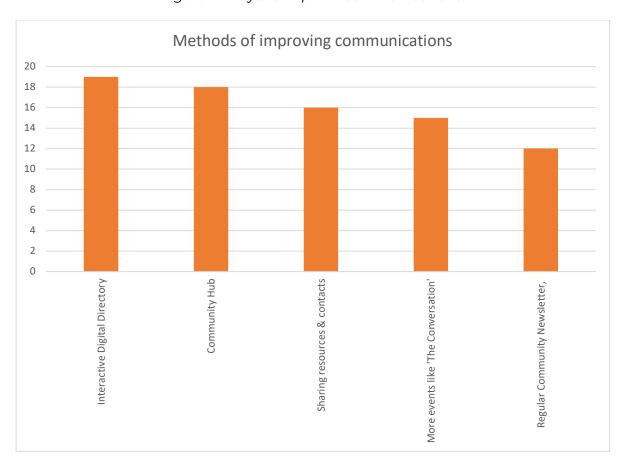


Figure 2: Ways to improve communications.

Respondents also mentioned using social media, in-person meetings and putting a short video from each organisation online as ways of improving communications and mutual knowledge.

Prioritising the ideas

We asked people to prioritise from the most mentioned "would like to have" things from the table discussions. They could choose from:

- Seamless life journey for children through support
- Happy fulfilled young people, selfsupporting, self-respecting
- Move to bottom upwards decisionmaking not top down
- Avoid duplication, more collaboration
- Apprenticeships with local businesses & young enterprise
- Good public transport
- Affordable accommodation
- Free parking for 1h in Christchurch
- Long term approach to strategy/funding/partnerships
- Integrated community organisation infrastructure

- Upskilling, education and training
- More provision for the homeless
- No need for Foodbanks
- Elimination of stigma around getting support
- Continuity of services
- Extend SEDCAT & more Neighbour Cars
- Improved mobility and getting out and about for older generation
- Warm furnished housing for those fleeing abuse
- Work with men
- Easy access to GPs and services
- Sustainable funding streams
- Support for young carers
- Make decisions based on needs

It was interesting to note that respondents prioritised both social gains; (affordable housing, local apprenticeships, good public transport, less use of foodbanks and happy fulfilled young people) and the infrastructure changes that would be needed to accomplish these (sustainable funding, bottom upwards decision-making, integrated community organisations).

All of these were thought to be important, but the results showed that the most popular things were:

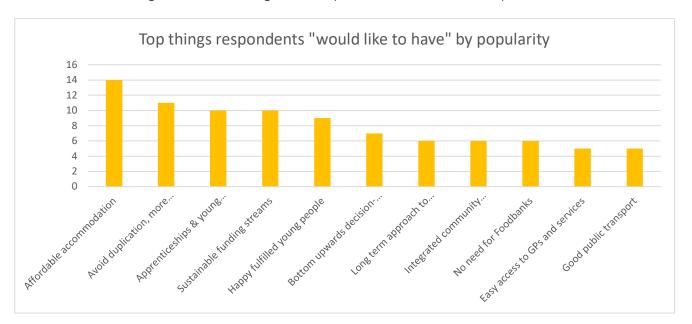


Figure 3: Prioritising most important areas for development

Community hub

Thinking about the priority that respondents gave to a community hub, we asked people whether they thought this was a priority. More than 90% of people said that they thought this was much needed.

We also asked; If we had a 'community hub' where should it be located? Of those responding, 56% suggested Christchurch Town Centre, 28% thought out of town with good parking would suit and 16% felt that existing community facilities should be used.

We asked what people thought the community hub should include. The options were:

- One Stop Shop for all info
- Drop in areas for organisations (CAB/DWP/Food Bank/Youth Organisations, computer help....)
- Advice Areas (housing/health/tax/domestic violence/youth/drug & alcohol abuse....)
- Small/Large meeting/treatment rooms
- Training areas (general, cookery, debt management, improving family relationships....)
- Social areas for volunteers/carers/mentors/community workers
- Youth facility areas (training/support/socialising)
- Exercise class/support group space (dementia sufferers, older generation)

The table below represents the responses to the areas identified.

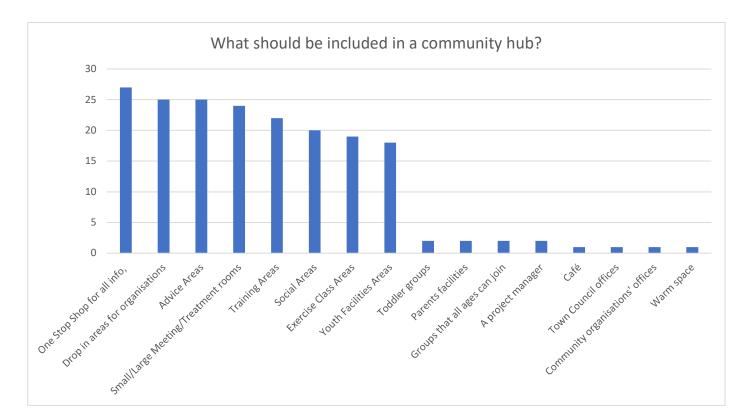


Figure 4: Community hub services

Working collaboratively

A theme that came out strongly from the discussions was that improving how the VCSE, and its partners work together, would be of benefit to all our work.

It was indicative of the success of the event that almost all the respondents said that they would be happy to work together to make some of the ideas into reality. Specifically:

- 83% of respondents said they would be interested in engaging in more regular contact with other Christchurch organisations
- 77% said they would be interested in working in partnership with other organisations
- 71% said they would be promoting/sharing other organisations efforts and work
- More than half (54%) said they would be up for working together on joint funding bids

This shows the level of enthusiasm that can be built on directly because of the Christchurch Conversation 2023.

6. Next Steps

Having now published the report we will seek feedback on the findings with a short follow up questionnaire to identify whether there are any 'quick wins' and what the priorities should be going forward.

Attendees will then be offered the opportunity to join a themed Task & Finish group focused on one of the identified priorities, which will then look at developing a plan for implementing achievable recommendations.

For example: a group will be commissioned to take forward the planning for a Youth Conversation during 2024/25

Thank you to everyone who has engaged thus far with the process but let's keep the conversation going through the ccp.conversation@gmail.com, as well as actively seeking opportunities to work collaboratively with each other. By doing so, we can provide a wider range of support to those most in need in our community. We will look to organise a follow up Conversation in 2025 which can also report on progress from this one!

Appendix 1: What It Was and Who Was Involved

The Christchurch Conversation was designed to explore the question:

"How do we work together to continue to build a connected community in Christchurch - celebrating the work that's already happening while recognising the challenges and opportunities ahead of us?"

- It was facilitated by Alastair Doxat-Purser, CEO of Faithworks and Rev Sandra Prudom, CEO of the CCP.
- Sponsored by the Christchurch Community Partnership and involving many partner agencies in the planning and delivery including Dorset Community Action, BCP Council and Faithworks, with the venue kindly provided by GodFirst Church.
- 97 people representing 45 organisations, attended from the VCSE, statutory (including health and education) business, and faith sectors.
- The panel included the Mayor of Christchurch Town Council, the Leads for BCP's Access to Food Partnership and Ageing Well Communities, and the Director of Somerford Youth & Community Centre/The People's Pantry.
- A celebration of the brilliant activities already happening in Christchurch which add value and bring hope to communities.
- An opportunity to work together to identify the major gaps in provision, the possible solutions and what attendees from the different sectors had to offer in terms of resources and opportunities for collaborative working. For example, around community transport as there are several providers who could work more closely together. Currently there is some collaboration on transport but this could be further developed and include other organisations.

The Organisations in Attendance (our sincere apologies if any omissions have been made)

- Age Concern
- BCP Council
- Christchurch BID
- Housing Associations Charitable Trust
- Bournemouth University
- Help & Care
- We Are With You
- Co-Create
- Christchurch Action Network (CAN
- Care
- Citizens Advice
- Christchurch Magdalen Trust
- WEA
- Christchurch Support Kabin(CSK)
- Christchurch Town Council
- Dorset Community Action (DCA)
- Dorset County Council
- Dorset NHS
- Dorset Community Foundation

- Faithworks
- Friendly Food Club
- Christchurch Foodbank
- Somerford Youth & Community Centre Christchurch Housing
- Listening Ear
- Livewell Dorset
- National Lottery Community Fund
- Dorset NHS
- New Milton Town Council
- Parks Foundation
- Prama
- Presto Print
- Recovery 4
- SEDCAT
- Twynham School
- Somerford Scouts
- Somerford Arc
- Sovereign Housing
- Talbot Village Trust

Appendix 2 Press Release

(also published in part by Daily Echo 24th October)

The 2023 Christchurch Conversation Christchurch Community Groups Collaborate

Over 50 local Christchurch organisations, as well as the Deputy Lord Lieutenant of Dorset George Streatfield, MBE and Christchurch Town Council Mayor, Cllr Vivienne Charrett, met last Monday (16th October) at the GodFirst conference venue in Christchurch for the return of the Christchurch Conversation, first run in 2018. The event witnessed a collaboration of local representatives from a wide range of statutory, voluntary, and charitable organisations, businesses, schools, and churches.

Coined the, CEO of Christchurch Community Partnership (CCP) Sandra Prudom, supported by Dorset Community Action, led the connective community groups through an evening of discussion and proposals.

She posed the question "How do we work together to continue to build a connected community in Christchurch, celebrate the work that's already happening and recognise the challenges and opportunities ahead of us." As attendees considered this, attention turned to a panel of guests representing SYCC & People's Pantry, BCP's Access to Food and Ageing Well Communities leads, and the Christchurch Town Mayor, to discuss four pressing issues present in Christchurch today: access to food, youth inclusion, social isolation, and community spaces.

There was then a break-out session on the tables, run by Alistair Doxat-Purser, CEO of Faithworks, followed by an event wide conversation to consider points raised. Given the enormous changes in the past 5 years, including the Christchurch council merger with BCP, the Covid pandemic plus the current Cost of Living crisis, it was no surprise that funding still lay at the heart of most issues. Also highlighted was the need for a main directory of services along with an improvement in inter organisational communications, both of which would help bridge a gap and assist those in need to access much needed help.

Attendees were then asked to imagine the future. Whilst there was a sense of frustration in some areas, the consensus was that there was a huge amount of good stuff going on, but also much scope for improvement and that the event had been a great opportunity to get together, exchange ideas and build connections to improve the quality of life for all residents of Christchurch. A full analysis report of the event will be produced by the organisers in due course.

(October 17th 2023 Sarah Desjonqueres CCP Comms Officer)



Conversation with purpose, leading to action.