

Berkshire's Vital Signs – Update 2014

Berkshire's Vital Signs report is a community 'check-up' that measures the quality of life in local communities and identifies our county's priorities, needs and opportunities for action.

Berkshire Community Foundation launched its Vital Signs report on 1 October 2013, which reported on how we think our county is doing in relation to 12 key themes. Grades were used to indicate priorities for action, based partly on how we were performing in relation to the rest of the UK but also on our assessment of the local situation.

Vital Signs Theme	Grade
Work and local economy	B
Getting started	C
The gap between rich and poor	D
Housing and homelessness	D
Safety and crime	D
Learning	C
Arts and culture	B
Strong communities	B
Environment	D
Health and wellbeing	B
Civil Society Organisations	D
Young People	D

The low grades (D) indicate that we must take action as soon as possible.

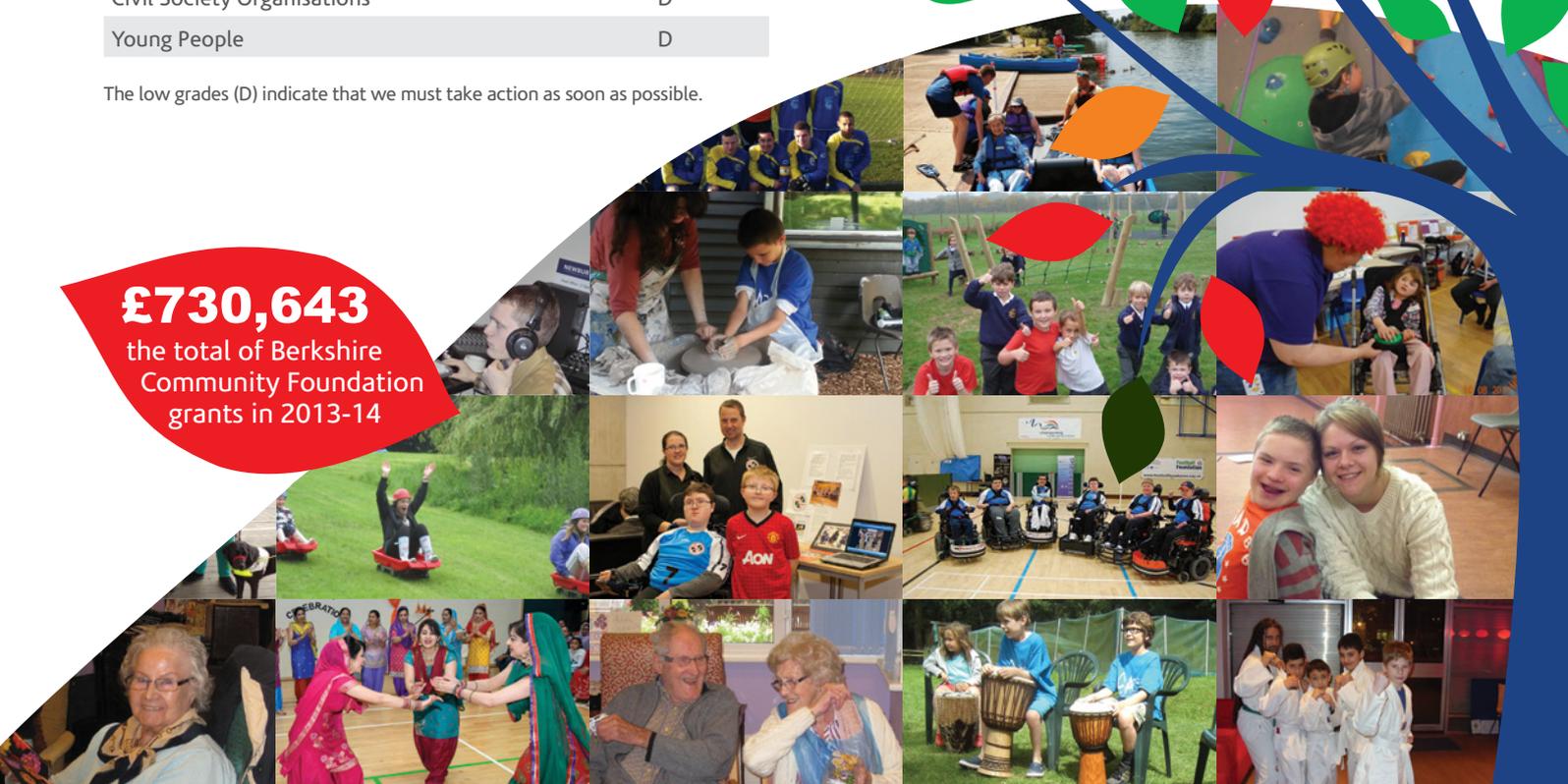
Berkshire is generally perceived as an affluent county. However, Vital Signs concluded that although there is a good overall quality of life, there is also a stark inequality across Berkshire. This has enabled us to identify the priority issues that present the most significant challenges and opportunities for change. We focus our charitable efforts for maximum impact and use our local knowledge to work with donors to encourage "community philanthropy" – the use of wealth to address local social issues.

Our intention is that Vital Signs will continue to inform the development of effective community philanthropy in Berkshire for years to come. This 2014 update focuses on three of the key areas which have emerged as real priorities in Berkshire:

- the gap between rich and poor,
- support for civil society organisations,
- young people.

£730,643

the total of Berkshire
Community Foundation
grants in 2013-14



The gap between rich and poor

In Berkshire there is stark contrast between the affluence of some communities and the deprivation of others. In the last year, Wokingham has been identified as one of the UK's healthiest places to live and Windsor as home to the UK's wealthiest. In contrast, several areas of Berkshire are within the top 20% for deprivation in the UK.

The problem is that people who live in 'pockets of deprivation' can be cut off from essential services. Easy access to education, shops, health services, benefits advisers and employment is only possible for people who either live close by or have good transport links. Whilst car ownership in Berkshire is high, there is less likely to be a regular bus service for those who live outside town centres and who cannot afford a car. Living closer to town usually means higher housing costs, including rising private sector rents, whilst average property prices in Berkshire continue to rise at a rate above the national average.

Community philanthropy, therefore, has a clear role to play in supporting local groups that are working to bridge the gap between rich and poor by focussing on the quality of life for those living in pockets of deprivation in the county.

Vital Statistics



Several areas of Berkshire are within the top 20% for deprivation in the UK.

Source: Berkshire's Vital Signs 2013

Civil Society Organisations

Public spending cuts and the current economic climate have proved challenging to civil society organisations that are battling to deliver much needed services in the face of reduced funding.

A survey of Berkshire residents (see page 4) found that around 50% of respondents aspired to build stronger ties between local people in their communities. Joining community groups was the most frequently mentioned way of tackling loneliness and isolation amongst incomers and those affected by disability, mental illness, aging or unemployment.

In many ways, Berkshire is well placed because people in more affluent communities are more likely to volunteer their time and give to charities. Volunteering and giving generates trust and co-operation, increasing a sense of community well-being.

The key to developing participation is promoting the needs and opportunities for involvement, as well as showing appreciation to those who serve their community in vital ways. This includes community philanthropists who, by acting together, can take a more strategic, longer term view, supporting interventions that produce a more sustainable impact.

Vital Statistics



66% of local groups surveyed had seen their funding reduced.

Source: Berkshire's Vital Signs 2013

Young People

In the survey of Berkshire residents (see page 4), people frequently commented on the need for improved skills and training, particularly amongst young people. Even with the Government's 'Raising the Participation Age' initiative, which ensures that young people continue in education and training for a longer period, youth unemployment still remains an issue. Many young people face challenging conditions, especially those in isolated rural communities or pockets of urban deprivation. To take advantage of an upturn in the jobs market, they need relevant education, skills and training if they are not to be left behind.

Urgent and innovative cross-sector action is therefore required to re-engage young people, especially those who are not in education, employment or training (NEETs). Civil society organisations play an important role, taking a preventative approach to engaging excluded young people, helping them gain confidence, self-esteem and basic skills. A number of Berkshire charities also offer volunteering

opportunities as an interim step into paid employment. This enables young people to develop skills and gain experience of work place practices, until paid jobs are found.

Much of the work carried out by Community Foundations involves tackling social exclusion for young people in local communities, through strategic funding for community projects which, for some young people, represent their only meaningful opportunity for engagement.

Vital Statistics



In Reading, over one in ten young people who want work cannot access it.

Source: The geography of youth unemployment: a route map for change, April 2014, The Work Foundation, Lancaster University

Helping to narrow the gap

Citizens Advice Bureaux (CABs) work with some of the most disadvantaged and excluded individuals in society, providing free, independent, confidential and impartial advice.

Over the last year, all Berkshire CABs have experienced high levels of enquiries relating to aspects of the Government's Welfare Reforms and, in particular, advice about debt and benefits. For example, at Reading CAB 36% of enquiries were about housing and benefits and 15% were about debt.

A grant of **£17,500** from Berkshire Community Foundation is funding Welfare Reform training sessions for local advisers. Local people can then get the advice and support they need to make the best choices for them and their families, improving their money management, maximising their income and avoiding debt.



Funding a new kind of community project model

Berkshire Community Foundation has awarded **£24,248** to 'Joggy Bear', a fitness, socialisation and literacy programme for disadvantaged young children at risk of social exclusion. With the help of the fun character, Joggy Bear, children learn how to re-address their behaviour and improve their social skills with fitness activities, sport and role play.

The programme is part of a pilot exercise to develop the way in which Community Foundations help projects with high potential to replicate a successful model, in order to benefit more communities. The pilot is funded through a grant to UK Community Foundations (UKCF) from the Queen's Trust.

This grant has enabled the working model to be packaged for wider roll-out and led to the Joggy Bear programme being approached by other specialist partners wishing to replicate it in nurseries, primary schools and family resource centres across the UK.



Funding an innovative social finance programme

Berkshire Community Foundation has joined together with Barrow Cadbury Trust, Big Society Capital, Bracknell Forest Homes, Buckinghamshire County Council and Esmée Fairbairn Foundation to create a **Social Impact Bond**. This bond will provide social finance to fund interventions supporting around 1,500 young people who are at risk of becoming NEET, and help them improve their employability.

A Social Impact Bond is a way of tackling social problems that require preventative interventions. Using this funding, local charity Adviza is delivering an innovative three year programme called *Energise*, working with 14-15 year olds across the Thames Valley. *Energise* helps vulnerable young people to build their resilience, confidence and aspiration and enables them to progress in their lives, particularly in terms of education and work. In Berkshire, *Energise* works with young people in Bracknell, Reading and Slough, as well as with disadvantaged groups in more rural areas.

The success of the intervention will be measured against a number of outcomes including improved behaviour, school attendance, educational qualifications and employment opportunities, and has already started to produce promising results.



The more you give, the stronger your community

Berkshire Community Foundation, in collaboration with the University of Reading, carried out a survey of community giving in Berkshire. 'Philanthropy in Berkshire and its Contribution to Community Wellbeing' was published in February 2014 and reveals that the more people give, the stronger their communities become.

The report reveals that giving is one of the greatest forces promoting community welfare. People who give time (volunteer) tend to also give money (charitable donations) and the more intensively they use their time for others, the more money they give. Giving is also associated with trust between people, lower deprivation levels and higher levels of personal life-satisfaction.

Charities and voluntary organisations are important in helping this giving process along; helping people to channel time and money giving outside of their close-knit social boundaries by providing bridges between people who would otherwise barely connect, and making sure that vulnerable groups were not excluded from community relationships.

Higher levels of volunteering and giving tend to be associated with communities that are affluent and well-networked. The better networked and engaged people are, the more they give – and the more people give, the stronger the community.

Giving is therefore closely related to social cohesion, something which is often neglected in public policy making because it is so hard to measure, but which is addressed by the charitable sector. By raising the profile of giving, we focus attention on one of the most important influences on social welfare.

The full report can be downloaded from our website www.berkshirecf.org/vitalsigns

Berkshire Community Foundation would like to thank the University of Reading for their support in producing this report.



Tell us your priorities

Berkshire's Vital Signs is just the beginning of an ongoing process of discussion and, as more people become involved, we expect to improve our knowledge of what is happening in Berkshire and what local people regard as important. What do you think? Do you agree with the priorities we have identified? What are the areas in which you think community philanthropy should be investing? Our online poll remains open on our website if you would like to influence the decisions being made about the Foundation's grants.

www.berkshirecf.org/vitalsigns

If you would like to know more about Berkshire's Vital Signs, please contact:



Registered Charity No: 1155173

Berkshire Community Foundation
1650 Arlington Business Park,
Theale, Reading, Berkshire RG7 4SA

Telephone: 0118 930 3021 Fax: 0118 930 4933

Email: info@berkshirecf.org

Website: www.berkshirecf.org