



Cheshire East

# **TOGETHER** for Children and Young People

*Together we will make Cheshire East a great place to be young*

## Cheshire East COVID Winter Grant Scheme Impact Report

May 2021



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## 1. Introduction and Summary

The COVID Winter Grant Scheme (CWGS) was a DWP funded programme with the aim of providing support to vulnerable households and families with children, particularly those affected by the pandemic. The CWGS ran from 01/12/20 until 31/03/2021, at which point the scheme was then extended until 16/04/21. The national value of the CWGS was £229m, of which Cheshire East Borough Council received £1.18m. The funding guidelines required a minimum of 80% of the funding to target both food and utilities, with a 20% discretion for essentials such as white goods. Reflecting these parameters, the funding guidelines also ring-fenced a minimum of 80% of the funding for children and families, with a further 20% allocation to vulnerable households.

To implement this programme, Cheshire East Council targeted approx. 9,500 known vulnerable/at risk children and families who would automatically receive their vouchers, these were:

- are in receipt of income related free school meals
- are in receipt of early years pupil premium and two-year funding
- are care leavers up to age 25
- are not in education, employment or training aged 16-18
- are young carers for their parents/carers
- are known to domestic abuse services

In addition to these groups, if professional agencies were able to identify a need, they could refer. Upon referral, they could also apply for utilities and white goods support. In summary:

- 43k vouchers given out
- Approx. 9.5k children and families received the grant
- 37.5k food vouchers provided to pre-existing groups with a further 3.8k provided via inquiry forms
- 1.6k utilities vouchers and support provided to children and families
- 104 households support with white goods requests

## 2. Cheshire East Council's Implementation

### 2.1 Planning and Mobilisation

Cheshire East's CWGS implementation began on the 01/12/20 and ran until the final day of the grant period, 16<sup>th</sup> April 2021. The project had 3 significant roll-out periods; the 2020 Christmas Holidays; February Half Term; and the Easter Holidays. External to these rollout periods, inquiry forms were available for families to access support.

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The CWGS steering group first met on the 13/11/20. The group had representatives from Early Help, Children's Social Care, Commissioning, Education, Finance, Internal Audit, Legal, Public Sector Transformation, Benefits and Communities. The SRO for the project was the Director of Early Help & Prevention, Ali Stathers-Tracey.

The decision was taken early to manage the project in-house to facilitate a targeted approach, to allow the council to develop its knowledge of our vulnerable young people and families, provide an opportunity for the council to develop a relationship with our most vulnerable, highlight the highest risk families and individuals for further support and to provide the opportunity to compose comprehensive data on the project's recipients. The inhouse method followed a process of identifying a range of eligibility criteria to include all at risk cohorts, and those whose risk was particularly affected by the pandemic during the winter months.

## 2.2 Cheshire East's CWGS Eligibility Criteria:

Cheshire East adopted the following eligibility criteria, ie those who are:

- in receipt of income related free school meals
- in receipt of early years pupil premium and two-year funding
- care leavers up to age 25
- not in education, employment or training aged 16-18
- young carers for their parents/carers
- known to domestic abuse services

The above groups amounted to over 9,000 young people and were identified as pre-existing groups who would receive food support automatically via their school or setting. In addition to these groups, referrals were accepted via trusted professionals for the following categories, ie those who are:

- known to children's social care and early help services
- parents/carers who are experiencing financial hardship due to being unable to work as their children are self-isolating
- vulnerable due to financial hardship and can be referred by a partner agency (e.g. GP, Teacher, Support Worker)

## 2.3 Implementation

The above cohorts were eligible for the scheme and so were able to access support in 3 targeted categories: food, utilities, and white goods.



- **Food** was provided via food vouchers. These were available from 01/12/20 until 16/04/21. The vouchers were purchased from Blackhawk Network which were initially valid for Tesco's, Morrison's, Aldi, Sainsburys, Asda, Waitrose, and M&S. Additionally, Aldi became available from 12/01/21. During the December roll out the vouchers were worth £15, per week, per child, which was increased to £20 on 18/01/21 when the need was identified.
- **Utilities** were available for electric, gas and water to the value of £49 per household. Both credit and prepaid meter households were supported. Utilities vouchers were purchased from Green Doctor Energy Consultants who provided additional energy advice to households referred. The first utilities vouchers were provided on 18/12/20 and were supplied until 16/04/2021.
- **White goods** were supplied via Cheshire East's Emergency Assistance team, based within the Benefits department. The benefits team had existing commissioned services called Click and St Paul's which were able to extend their support to the CWGS. The white goods were accessible once per household on a need's basis, with households able to access electric cooker, fridge, washing machine or microwave. Most goods supplied were recycled or refurbished but in some rare cases a new item would be provided. The first white goods referrals were accepted on 27/01/21 and were accepted until 16/04/21.

### 3. Impacts of the COVID Winter Grant Scheme

#### 3.1 Summary of Impacts

The impacts of the CWGS can be viewed in appendix A. In summary, the impacts of the project were considerable, working with approx. 9,500 young people and families across Cheshire East, with a small percentage of young people from out of area (< 1%). In total, 41,627 food vouchers were provided to young people and families; 9,197 in December 2020; 9,403 in February 2021; 19,084 (9,542 young people) in April 2021 and 3,893 via inquiry forms. The main geographical areas of need (in descending order) were Crewe, Macclesfield, Nantwich, Congleton, Sandbach, Wilmslow, Knutsford, Alsager and Poynton.

In addition to food, the project also supported utilities and white good referrals from trusted professionals. In summary, 1689 utility vouchers provided over the course of the project, which equates to 975 pre-payment meter vouchers, 545 credit meter vouchers and 64 formal energy consultations (169 referrals yet to be completed).





In terms of white goods, the project supported a total of 122 households. The main goods requested were cookers (50), washing machines (37), fridge (21) and microwaves (14). The main geographical areas of need (in descending order) were Crewe, Macclesfield, Nantwich, Congleton, Sandbach, Wilmslow, Knutsford, Alsager and Poynton.

### 3.2 Pre-existing Cohort breakdown

Appendix B illustrates the postcodes of the settings which assisted the council in the CWGS. The report shows the most common areas that required support were Crewe, Macclesfield and Nantwich. However, Congleton, Sandbach, Wilmslow, Knutsford, Alsager and Poynton also had notable areas of need. In total, 369 schools/setting/colleges participated in the CWGS and assisted Cheshire East Council's voucher rollout.

The top 5 schools/settings/colleges which required the most pre-existing vouchers were Sir William Stanier Community School (715 vouchers), Underwood West Academy (647 vouchers), Wilmslow High School (625 vouchers), Ruskin Community High School (600 vouchers) and Macclesfield College (558 vouchers). The average number of vouchers sent to schools/settings/colleges was 75. Schools received the vast majority with approx. 82% of pre-existing food vouchers going via schools. Our second largest partner were early year settings who received approx. 8% of all vouchers.

Across the 3 implementation periods a trend was identified of increasing needs. The Christmas implementation went to a total of 9,197 individuals across all settings. The February half term release went to a total of 9,403 individuals and the Easter implementation required a total of 9,542 vouchers. This equates to an average of 9,380 vouchers per release, with a 3.8% increase from Christmas to Easter, a 2.2% increase from Christmas to February, and a 1.5% increase from February to Easter. Awareness may attribute to the increase, which we will continue to monitor when moving into the COVID Support Grant phase.

### 3.3 Food Inquiry Form Breakdown

Appendix C illustrates the postcodes of the recipients of the CWGS inquiry form who had requested for food. The total inquiry form food requests came to 3,893, with 28% referrals from primary schools (1089) and 18% from secondary schools (704). The team witnessed a steady increase in referrals across the grant period as awareness grew. The report shows the most common areas that required support were Crewe, Macclesfield and Nantwich. However, Congleton, Sandbach, Wilmslow, Knutsford, Alsager and Poynton also had notable areas of need.



The most common supermarkets requested was Aldi, Asda and Tesco, with Aldi being the most popular supermarket. A range of other settings participated in the inquiry form section of the scheme, with referrals being accepted from settings ranging from the NHS to libraries to 3<sup>rd</sup> sector charities. A full breakdown of referral agencies can be viewed in appendix D.

### 3.4 Utilities Inquiry Form Breakdown

Appendix E illustrates the postcodes of the recipients of the CWGS inquiry form who had requested utilities support. The total inquiry form food requests came to 1,689. The vast majority of referrals came from primary schools, with 18% from secondary schools. The most common support request was for 975 pre-payment meter vouchers. In addition, 545 credit meter vouchers were received, alongside 64 formal energy consultations. At the time of writing this report 169 vouchers were yet to be supplied.

There was a steady increase in referrals across the grant period as awareness grew. The report shows the most common areas that required support were Crewe, Macclesfield and Nantwich. However, Congleton, Sandbach, Wilmslow, Knutsford, Alsager and Poynton also had notable areas of need.

## 4. White Goods Inquiry Form Breakdown

Appendix D illustrates the postcodes of the recipients of the CWGS inquiry form who had requested white goods support. The total inquiry for white goods requests came to a total of 122 households. The main goods requested were cookers (50), washing machines (37), fridge (21) and microwaves (14). The main geographical areas of need (descending order) were Crewe, Macclesfield and Congleton.

## 5. Benefits of the COVID Winter Grant Scheme

The benefits of the scheme are most notably the scale and scope of the project, with the project sending out over 40,000 vouchers and working with approx. 9,500 children and families. Outside of the numerical data, the inhouse method implemented by the project also brought about notable realised outcomes. Firstly, the project was able to develop and grow its relationship with the community. This includes the recipients of the grant, schools, settings, and colleges. In the process of doing this, we have also developed a wealth of data



which can now be used to develop our understanding of our most vulnerable and map out where the need is in Cheshire East.

Alongside the established relationships, a working group positioned to swiftly deal with future grants with direct lines of communications has also been created and tested. Project engagement with our at-risk cohort has also allowed the signposting for further services to be completed, including Free School Meal sign up and Emergency Assistance. Further data benefits include being able to update our Free School Meal eligible list from our data.

Capturing feedback from those who used the scheme operationally and from recipients has been vital to evaluating the effect of the scheme. As the project had a wide scope of stakeholders and recipients, a variety of comments from these groups have been captured and represented below. Comments from families, schools, settings and front-line professionals produce a positive response to the CWGS. The most common themes were:

- ease of access
- timeliness of support
- the reliability of the vouchers
- the available spending categories.

These resulted in reductions in anxiety for families, improvements in food quality/nutrition, warm homes and increased assurance/security.

An example of some of the comments from families/professionals are set out below:

The vouchers have been really useful and a big help. The instructions on how to use them were also easy to follow

All of my families have been extremely grateful for this support so thank you very much!

Accessing the winter grant scheme has definitely eased some anxieties for parents around finances, especially the support towards utility bills!

The Winter Grant Scheme, supported my most in need families. Without it they would have been struggling to feed their children - the vouchers were easily accessible to them. My families were very grateful for this help and I felt it provided them with the ethos that they were supported during these difficult times.

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## 6. Challenges and Future Learning

The main learning outcomes from the programme were around its operational implementation. This includes targeting communications and releasing the inquiry form after the main voucher release to avoid unnecessary referrals. The project team have amalgamated the learning and experience from the previous 4 months and are now in a strong position to deliver future work of this kind. Project feedback also made clear the vouchers made immediate short-term improvements to young people and families outcomes. However, we need to consider the long term needs of this cohort and how best to address them.

## 7. Conclusion and Next Steps

In conclusion, the CWGS had a major impact on the recipients of the grant. The grant has been far reaching and had a significant impact on those families in need during the pandemic.

The grant closed on the 16/04/21, however, a follow up grant called the COVID Support Grant (CSG) began implementation on 17/04/21, which will utilise the data and learning from the CWGS to benefit those families in need in Cheshire East.

The Holiday Activity Fund (HAF) was also implemented from Easter 2021, and will be running in Summer and Christmas 2021. HAF will provide meals and holiday activities for FSM eligible young people and will continue from the work the CWGS completed. In addition to the CSG and HAF the Department for Health and Social Care also increased healthy start vouchers from £3.10 to £4.25, alongside allocating £16m to 3<sup>rd</sup> sector charities.



## 8. Appendices

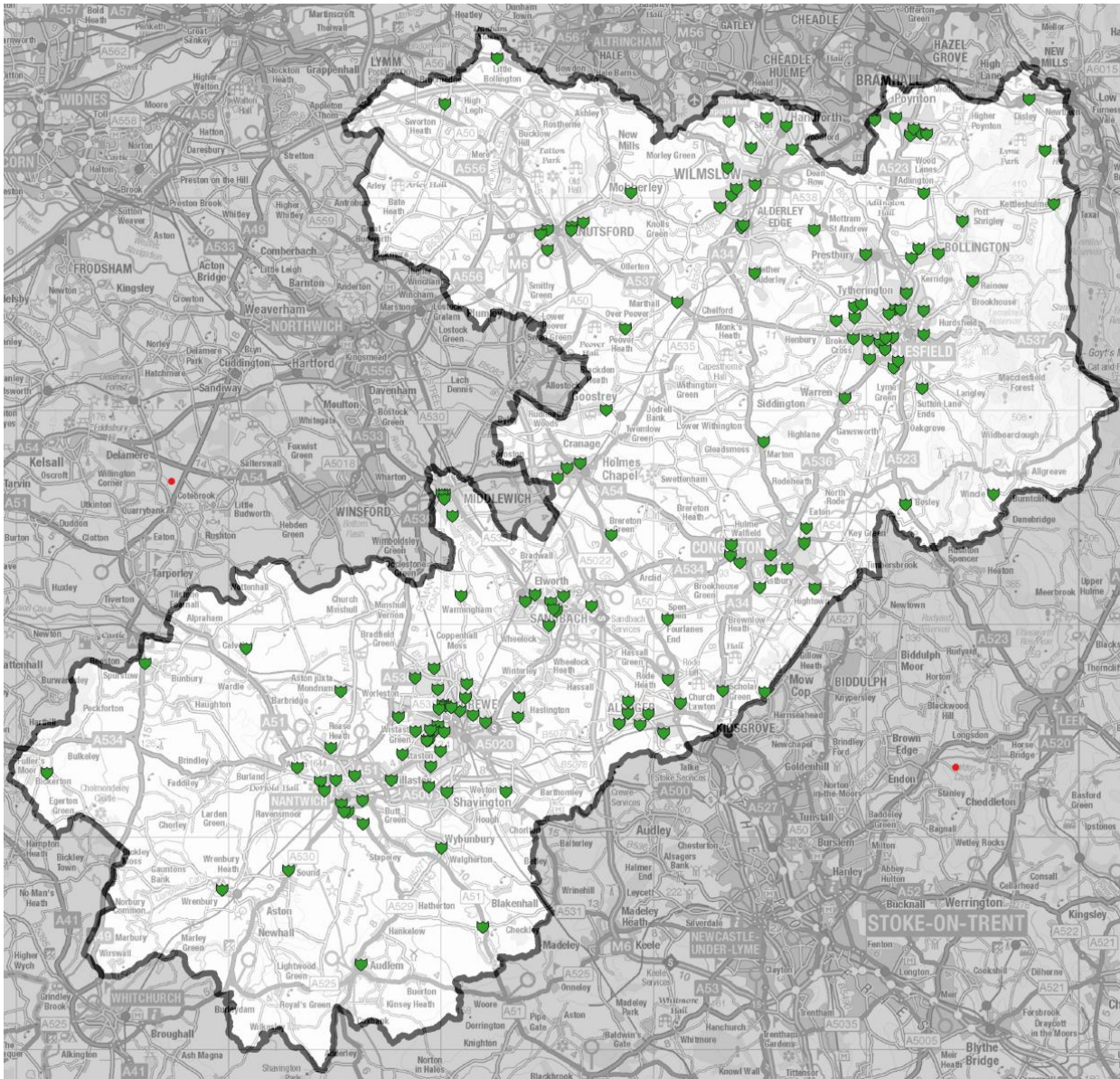
### Appendix A Voucher Delivery Tracker

	16/04/2021
<b>Inquiry Forms Received (per child)</b>	
Food	4222
Utilities	3699
White Goods	281
Total No on inquiry forms	4753
<b>Vouchers Issued</b>	
Food	3893
Utilities (households)	1689
Christmas Break	9197
February Half Term	9403
Easter Break	19084 (2 x £20)
Benefits - food vouchers	50
Total	43316
<b>Inquiry Forms Completed</b>	
Food	3893
Ground Work (households) (sent to GroundWork)	1453
White Goods (households)	104
Total	5450

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## Appendix B - COVID Winter Grant Scheme School/Setting/College Map (16/04/2021)

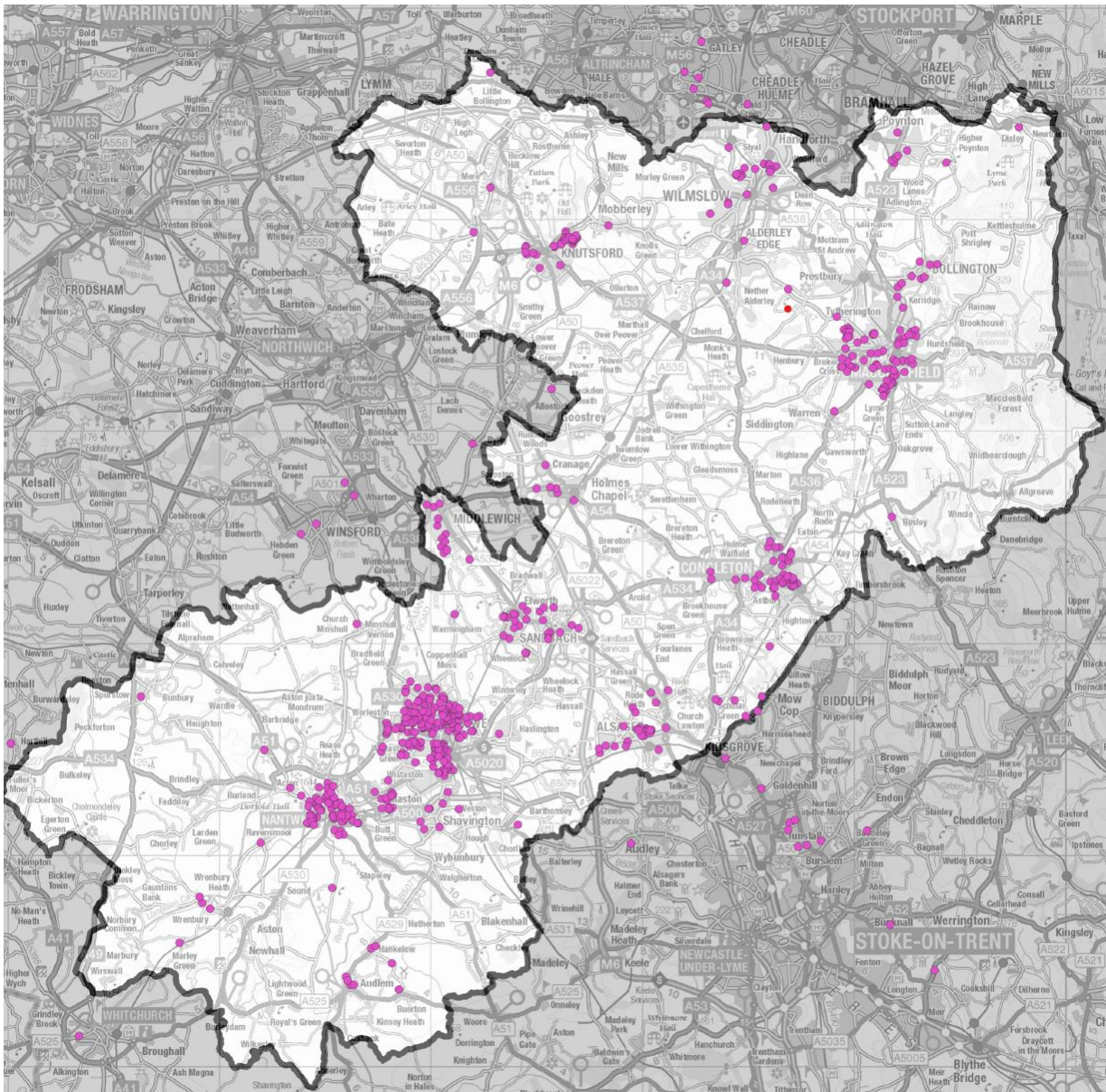


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## Appendix C, COVID Winter Grant Scheme Food Inquiry Map (16/04/2021)

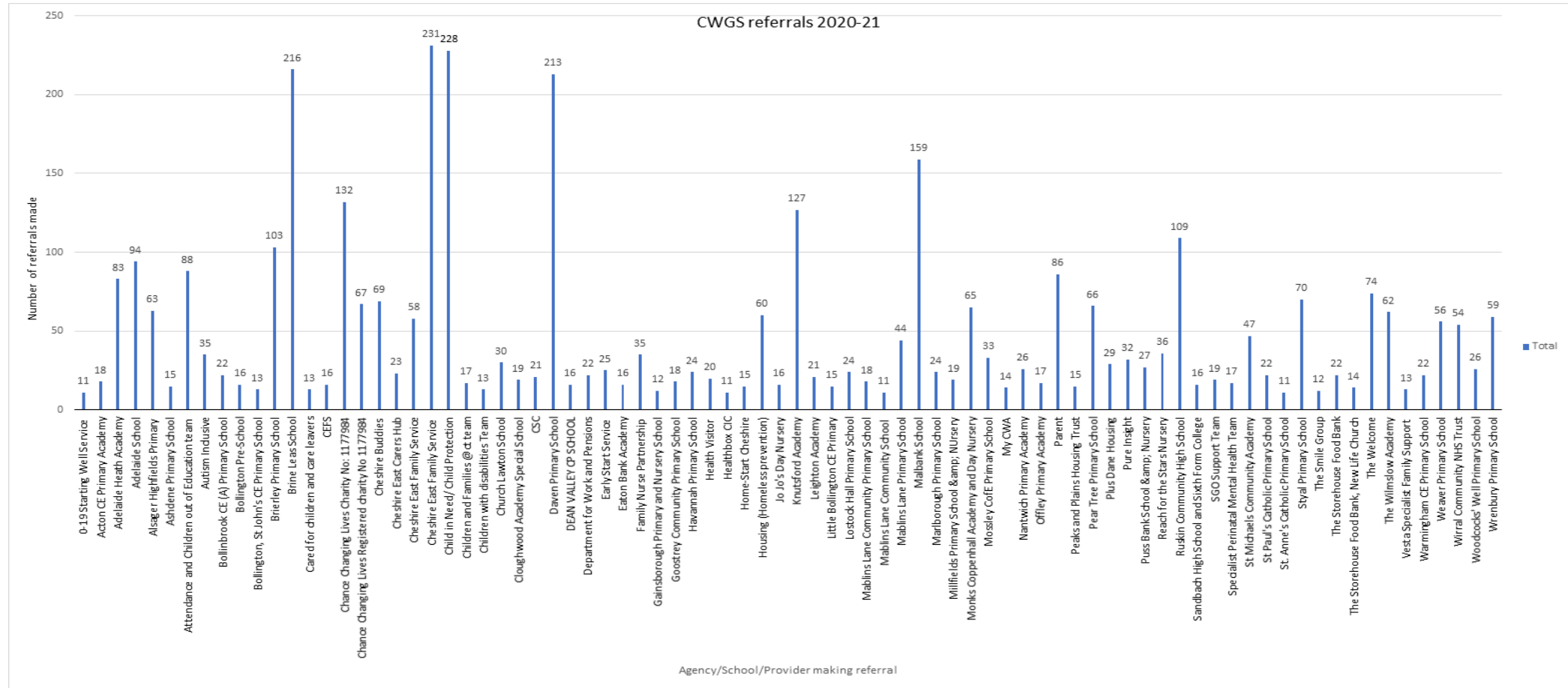


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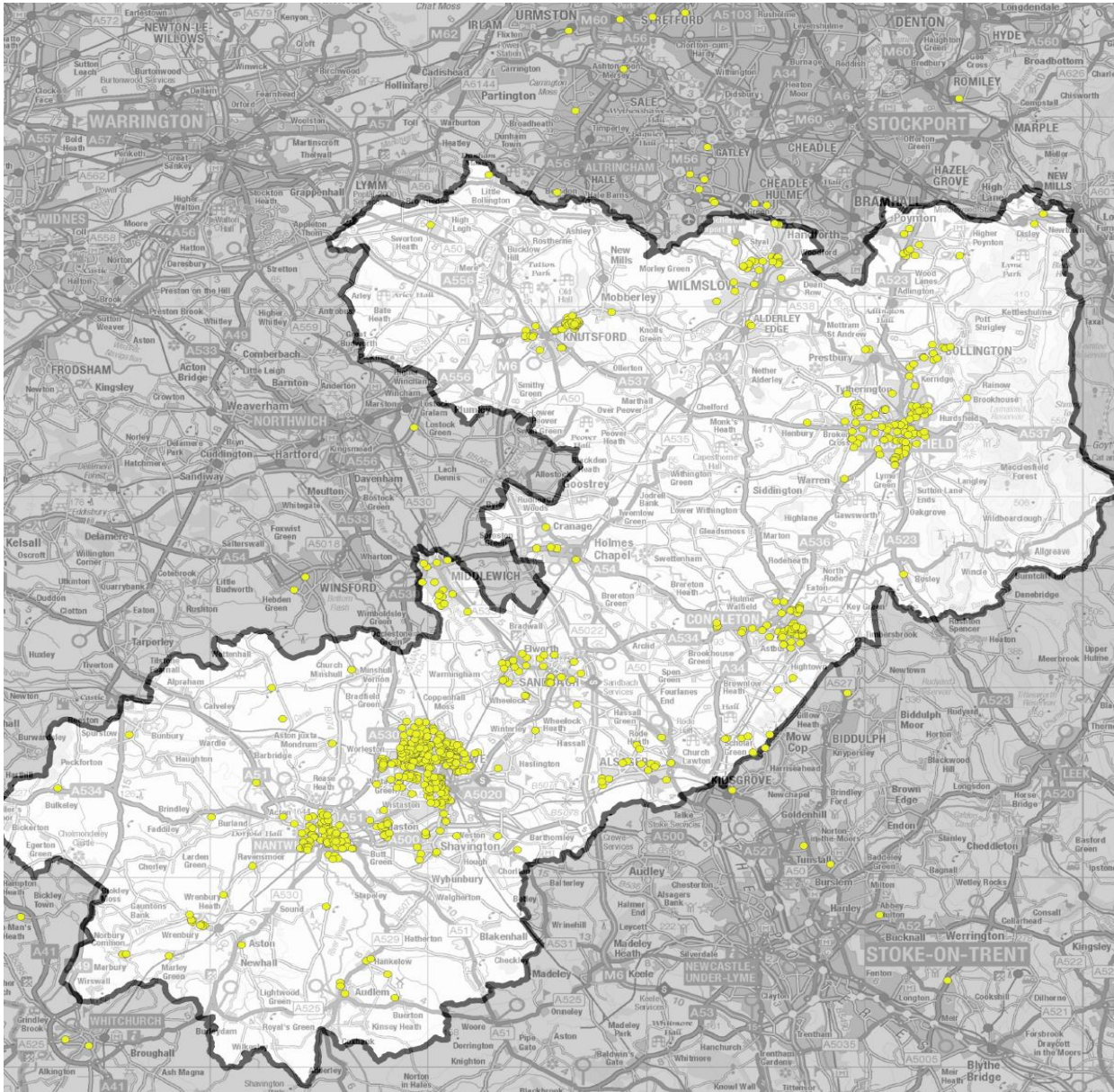


## Appendix D, CWGS Inquiry Form Referral Bar Chart



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## Appendix E, CWGS White Goods referral map



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