

SHORT REPORT	
Subject Matter	Support for Elderly and Vulnerable Residents
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Date	22 April 2020



1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The report outlines the council's response to supporting vulnerable people in our communities who are unable to leave their property due to the increased risk to them if they were to contract COVID-19.
- 1.2 It summarises how we have identified vulnerable people and the support that has been put in place to assist them during the current crisis.
- 1.3 The support can be summarised as follows:
 - 1.3.1 Contact with those identified as vulnerable – with referrals being made into the "Central Hub" (the team which matches need with support)
 - 1.3.2 Establishment of a "Food Hub" at Tipton Sports Academy
 - 1.3.3 Delivery of Food Parcels to vulnerable/elderly residents and those contacting the Emergency Helpline
 - 1.3.4 Developing a range of volunteer support services with Sandwell Council of Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) to ensure that follow on support is available.

2. KEY ISSUES

- 2.1 On 24th March 2020, the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government issued guidance outlining the need for a partnership approach between national and local agencies to support those people in our communities who are at the highest risk of severe illness ('the clinically extremely vulnerable') if they contract COVID-19 and therefore have been advised to isolate themselves ("shielding") for a period of time.

2.2 Shielding is designed to protect people from serious illness as well as help manage the current demand being experienced by the NHS. There are three strands of support being offered people who need to shield and do not have a close network of support available to them:

- Food: delivery of basic food parcels directly to people’s doorsteps
- Medicines: provision of prescription medication delivered by community pharmacies.
- Social contact: local authorities, working with the voluntary and community sector, providing social support to people who might be feeling isolated at this difficult time.

2.5 Whilst the introduction of shielding aims to identify and support people within communities who will require help and support due to their current and recent medical history, the Council also recognises the ‘shielding list’ does not identify everyone who either may be vulnerable or those who may require support and assistance during this crisis. We have therefore identified a local authority vulnerable-risk group to sit alongside the information we receive from the NHS about people who are currently shielding and those who are identified as high risk.

2.7 In identifying our vulnerable group we have used information from council departments such as Adult Social Care, Revenues & Benefits and Neighbourhoods & Communities and identified those at most risk by virtue of risk factors such as age group, location and specific vulnerability factors we are aware of.

Type of Cohort	Number of Cohort
SMBC Vulnerable-Risk Group	9,101
NHS Severe-Risk Group (excluding those on SMBC Vulnerable-Risk Group)	1,418
Grand Total	10,519

2.8 We have reached out to both the ‘NHS high-risk group’ and our ‘Local Authority vulnerable-risk group’ in a variety of ways.

- A council communication has been sent to every household in Sandwell advising them of the emergency contact number and email address.
- A team, made up of staff from across the council, have contacted both groups to identify if there is an urgent need for either practical support (food/prescriptions etc) or a form of social care support.
- Where contact details for a potentially vulnerable person are not available a “door knocking exercise” has been undertaken to identify the support needs of these individuals.

- 2.9 Where it has been identified a resident is in urgent need of essential supplies, rereferrals have been made to the “Central Hub”, who are able to arrange for the provision of a basic package of food and household essentials to be supplied.
- 2.3 To date, over 60 employees from across the council have come together to help with packaging of food and deliveries at the Tipton Sports Academy. We also have a number of volunteers supporting delivery, ranging from taxi firms, the Fire Service through to the Albion Foundation. Full social distancing and health and safety guidelines are being followed at the “Food Hub”.
- 2.4 The “Food Hub” has been stocked using local suppliers and wholesalers and there have been large numbers of donations of fresh food and items from local businesses and restaurants. In addition, we provide other essential items such as nappies, baby milk or sanitary products where required.
- 2.5 Since the establishment of the “Food Hub”, over 2,000 parcels have been distributed to those who have contacted the Emergency helpline, have been identified as needing support via the Children’s Trust, have been placed in temporary accommodation due to them being previously homeless, were identified by us as needing extra support or were on the Government’s shielded list but were unsupported (or were still awaiting Government support).
- 2.6 There has been a direct delivery of 55 food boxes from central government – we understand this to be a one-off delivery, however a weekly supply has been delivered to a number of residents on the shielded list.
- 2.7 Recipients of boxes will be contacted by our helpline staff to ascertain if they wish to be part of the SCVO volunteer offer regarding future support to purchase food/essentials to enable the Food Hub to focus support in specific areas.
- 2.8 This follows an appeal by SCVO/SMBC which has led to over 500 residents coming forward offering to provide practical help and support to other residents.
- 2.9 SCVO are the main point of contact for volunteering (both volunteers and volunteer involving organisations). They have contacted all volunteers by email and phone and have carried out a very light touch assessment of skills and volunteering preferences. 50 volunteers have already been placed with organisations such as West Bromwich food bank, Brushstrokes, BUDS and Accord. The others will be deployed in emerging initiatives such as **Good Neighbours** and **Sandwell Together**, as well as responding to any requests from **Community Offer**.

2.9.1 **Good Neighbours** scheme: Additional support for residents who under normal circumstances would be perfectly able to lead an independent life and would not need on-going support from the council (short term need during crisis). Volunteers in their immediate neighbourhood provide on-going practical help with shopping, staying in touch (by phone or on line), dog walking, picking up prescriptions etc, potentially until the coronavirus emergency is over.

2.9.2 **Sandwell Together befriending service.** Keeping in touch by phone or Facetime this service is for people who are socially isolating (either short term or for the duration of the corona emergency). This includes vulnerable people in care homes where contact time has been reduced. Contact can vary from:

- a regular short call to keep in touch and check that things are ok
- longer chats to pass the time of day and reduce social isolation

2.9.3 **Community Offer:** provides additional support for residents who may be vulnerable and at risk and have on-going needs where a range of support will help them to manage their situation to cope for the duration of the emergency. Teams of community-based staff provide a range of practical support for Sandwell residents and in addition will support both the Enhanced Assessment Beds and Hospital discharge where required.

2.10 Volunteers have not gone through any rigorous screening or checking process and residents will need to be informed that they will be receiving support from another resident. Safeguards are being put in place to keep both the resident and the volunteer safe, such as guidance on social distancing, paying for shopping and reporting any concerns.

3. RISKS

3.1 Data from MHCLG has been inconsistent and although downloaded daily there has been issues with data quality, which has required data cleansing to be undertaken.

3.2 Whilst all residents identified as being “shielded” on in the wider “vulnerable” group will have been contacted via telephone or at their premises, there is always a danger that some may be uncontactable and may not receive support.

3.3 There is a danger that supplies may run low at the Food Hub. We have now agreed bulk orders with a smaller number of approved suppliers, although some items are still in limited supply.

- 3.4 Audit and keeping track of expenditure – we have put in place processes to monitor all expenditure and have included finance and audit in the work to ensure financial regulations are observed.
- 3.5 Cost of Food Hub –at present overall costs of food is averaging at £30,000 per week. This does not include the cost of stock being stored at Tipton Sports Academy.
- 3.6 There is still some uncertainty around central government support to those on the shielded list – who is receiving direct support and when the parcels are being received. We have supported some on this list due to the lag time between referral and delivery.
- 3.7 Keeping residents and volunteers as safe as possible: When SCVO match a resident to a volunteer they will reinforce the message that the resident is being supported by another resident, there has only been a light touch checking process and that the resident can contact SCVO if they are not happy with the arrangement. They will give a similar message to volunteers. Volunteers are given guidelines on social distancing, hand washing, limiting travel and what to do if they have a concern about a resident. Volunteers are not expected to enter a resident’s house or take their bank details.
- 3.8 Ensuring residents do not respond to “rogue” operators purporting to be from the council, offering food boxes at a price – social media is helping to combat this.
- 3.9 Payment for food/essentials via the volunteering scheme – work is ongoing to look at PayPal or “top up” cards/post office methods.

4. NEXT STEPS

- 4.1 Our next steps are to ensure that all of those people we have spoken to who required our assistance are provided with ‘ongoing support’ where required through the duration of the crisis.
- 4.2 Fully establishing the support pathway into the voluntary and community sector via Sandwell Council of Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) and working with existing partners to enable us to do this.
- 4.3 Monitor numbers of referrals into Good Neighbours, Community Offer and Sandwell Together. Monitor number of repeat calls into the council’s emergency helpline and take case management approach to these to improve the support offered. Monitor number of emergency food parcels.
- 4.4 Regional conversations via the Vulnerable Persons cell have identified the potential to work strategically with a supermarket partner, who can provide the scale and variety of goods required for future food parcels.