

<b>Report of:</b>	<b>Head of Housing and Partnerships</b>
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<b>Portfolio Leader:</b>	<b>Community Safety and Partnerships</b>
<b>Key Decision:</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Report Track:</b>	<b>Cabinet: 12/11/20</b>

## Cabinet

12 November 2020

### Covid-19: Task Force and Community Hub Response – March to July 2020

#### 1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To inform Members about the community support response to the COVID-19 emergency and the lessons learned.
- 1.1 To obtain Cabinet approval for grant allocation to Support Staffordshire.

#### 2 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 To note the work of the Council's Community Vulnerability Hub and the local voluntary sector in section 3.
- 2.2 To note the lessons for the Council learned during the response to the COVID-19 emergency in section 4.
- 2.3 To recommend that Cabinet approve a grant allocation of £8,350 to Support Staffordshire for a period of 12 months to deliver an additional 5 hours per week support to the Voluntary Sector within the District.

#### 3 Key Issues and Reasons for Recommendations

##### Key Issues

- 3.1 The initial response to the COVID-19 emergency focussed on the need to address vulnerable residents (including those shielding) accessing food and the provision of personal protective equipment (PPE). The Council addressed this by quickly mobilising the Community Vulnerability Hub. Appendix 1 provides an overview of the Community Emergency Response network for the District.
- 3.2 The Council had statutory duties to meet – in particular contacting and supporting vulnerable housing tenants, homeless and rough sleepers. A key

action was to secure accommodation for rough sleepers and homeless people in the District.

- 3.3 Structures were established at County level through the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) – in particular to co-ordinate the emerging food distribution arrangements. The LRF organised meetings of the co-ordinating organisations which, enabled knowledge sharing.
- 3.4 Staffordshire County Council contacted those shielding (those deemed to be “clinically extremely vulnerable”) and self isolating people who had requested assistance, ensuring their immediate needs were being met. Cases were passed to District and Borough Councils for further support. The County Council referred 168 cases to Cannock Chase. People were signposted to organisations for support with shopping, pharmacy/prescriptions and befriending services.
- 3.5 Cannock Chase benefitted from the early work of local “mutual aid” organisations – in particular Chase Coronavirus Support Network (CCSN), Heath Hayes and Wimblebury Support Group – and from the well established Cannock and Rugeley Foodbanks and the Salvation Army. Regular meetings were held with these organisations and with Support Staffordshire, to discuss issues and share learning. The presence of these very active organisations was extremely valuable and meant that the Council food resources were used as a last resort. Support was also provided from Inspiring Healthy Lifestyles (IHL) volunteers who were furloughed during this period.
- 3.6 At the request of the Government, Council Officers telephoned 500 local people who were shielding to encourage them to register for Government support; these were people who had not responded to many attempts by Government to contact them.
- 3.7 Drawing on a large number of Council service records, 4,700 local people who might be considered vulnerable were contacted by letter to offer assistance. 3,600 people who had not responded to this letter were telephoned by District Council Officers; the vast majority of those contacted did not need assistance though the contact was appreciated by most.
- 3.8 There were some very positive aspects to the response phase:
  - the Hub was mobilised very quickly and demonstrated how the Council can collaborate across services and with external partners;
  - staff involved in the response work were very flexible and had a strong “can do” attitude. During the course of the lockdown response phase, up to 50 Council staff were involved in various tasks, including staff seconded to work at Cannock Foodbank and support with transporting food donations and making deliveries;
  - particularly complex IT challenges were met – including provision of equipment necessary for people working from home in support of the Hub;
  - local networking through partner organisations helped to reach people who might otherwise have been missed.

## 4 Relationship to Corporate Priorities

- 4.1 This report supports the Council's Corporate Improving Community Well-Being priority – specifically the objective Supporting Vulnerable People.

## 5 Report Detail

### Shielding

- 5.1 There were difficulties and confusion in the early stages about which parts of the local, County and national systems were supporting specific people. The NHS shielding list was not received until 25th April and was of poor quality. The shielding list was “dynamic” with people being added to and taken off the list throughout as guidance changed and different parts of the NHS made decisions. Shielding ended in July 2020 although the list of Clinically Extremely Vulnerable people has been maintained by the NHS.
- 5.2 In September 2020 the County Council confirmed that the District Council will have access to this list; which will enable the Council to respond to resident's calls if they are calling because they need additional support (second wave, local lockdown). **This list provides a core list of those deemed most vulnerable due to their clinical condition and support should be offered to those on this list that have no access to family, friends or neighbour support.** The Government has indicated that the delivery of free food and essential items parcels will not be part of any future shielding. People on the list should still be encouraged to register for assistance because this would give them priority for having medication delivered, priority for delivery slots for online supermarket shopping and access to the support of NHS volunteer responders – this is for a range of support including personal shopping and befriending phone calls.

### Data issues

- 5.3 Identifying our own vulnerable local people in addition to the shielding list was key to ensuring the Council's response to the COVID-19 emergency was going to ensure support reached those most in need. As detailed above access to the shielding data and County Council information was particularly difficult. The Council therefore undertook a comprehensive review of all its data, 17 work streams, to provide an integrated vulnerable persons list.

The creation of the list was very time consuming in bringing the individual records together and the lack of the standard national Unique Property Reference Number on NHS data did not facilitate a matching process.

Subsequently, having access to the various workstreams enabled more targeted lists to be produced – e.g. Over 70 and living alone.

In accordance with the Recovery Work Stream Action Plan, arrangements are in place to create an updated vulnerable persons list as and when required enabling an overarching list and targeted list to be produced within a two day turnaround period.

- 5.4 The list will not be comprehensive since it can only be created by examining certain data characteristics. The information obtained to date from the existing list will be populated into the new list, with the proviso of it being backward looking. Local knowledge of Members and Officers can also be useful to identify people in need of support who might not appear on the Council service records. Town and Parish Councils may also be able to help with this.
- 5.5 There may be examples of individuals having to self isolate for short fixed periods of time – either due to workplace or other outbreaks. Options need to be offered to those that do not have access to friends, family or neighbour support – and this is best done at the point of contact from Test and Trace or other contacts. People can be offered short-term (3 weeks) prioritisation for supermarket delivery slots and also signposted to local support (foodbanks and so on). Options can also be shared on social media and the Council’s website.

### **Voluntary Sector Legacy**

- 5.6 Across the whole system there has been a significant increase in volunteering – the capacity in the system in excess of what was needed. Locally, the District Council was lucky to have CCSN and Heath Hayes and Wimblebury Support Group active so early in the emergency. Well resourced and organised foodbanks in Cannock and Rugeley both saw increases in demand. The Salvation Army also saw an increase in demand for their support.
- 5.7 The County Council has switched their emergency response from local distribution arrangements managed by themselves to local “anchor” organisations – and CCSN is currently undertaking those deliveries in Cannock Chase, with stock held at foodbanks and the Salvation Army.
- 5.8 The District Council was able to use these existing support mechanisms to lead on assistance and in the future the use of local voluntary organisations to do any local food distribution will be invaluable during any second wave or local lockdown.
- 5.9 The creation of the Council’s own vulnerability hub enabled an overarching co-ordinating mechanism to be put in place and enabled resources to be redirected to where they were required rather than duplicated.
- 5.10 It is however recognised that the nature of a second wave or local lockdown may be different with the vast majority of previous volunteers remaining in work rather than in lockdown and contingency plans are currently being looked at.

### **Vulnerability Hub**

- 5.11 The Community Vulnerability Hub as detailed earlier has been mothballed since 17<sup>th</sup> July. The mothballing process ensured that its infrastructure remained in place enabling the Hub to be reactivated as appropriate.
- 5.12 Staff are on standby however, the staffing of the Hub will remain flexible to reflect the requirements of critical services and the exact role of the Hub in the future

- 5.13 A training package exists for call handlers enabling additional staff to be brought into the Hub as appropriate

### **Future Voluntary Activity**

- 5.14 Whilst the voluntary groups that were formed have scaled back their operations, Support Staffordshire has been working with Rugeley Community Churches and Cannock and Hednesford Churches of the Salvation Army to enable them to take on the role of “anchor organisations” within the District, overseeing the support operations in their parts of the District should the need arise. The County Council hosts the “Doing our bit” system to enable and encourage people to register as volunteers and be matched with volunteering opportunities.
- 5.15 There is also the option to refer residents to NHS Volunteer Responders – to support the just over 4,100 residents registered on the SPL for the District. However, a localised response is the preferred option to signpost residents.
- 5.16 Two of the biggest emerging issues are around loneliness and grass-roots community groups at risk of disappearing. Support Staffordshire has been encouraging the establishment of local “Good Neighbour” schemes and has also been linking in with known group leads to find out how they can offer to support residents by operating differently in innovative ways i.e. silver surfers, book swaps, befriending, gardening, dog walking etc.
- 5.17 The District Council does not currently have the capacity to support the development of groups, therefore it is recommended that Cabinet approves the funding request from Support Staffordshire to deliver on engaging with voluntary groups within the District. This would enable these groups to make a quicker recovery and to encourage and facilitate the formation of new groups to meet local needs. Support Staffordshire currently has one part time Social Action Officer that works with Chadsmoor communities and a Senior Locality Officer (32 hours per week) who also covers Newcastle, Stafford and South Staffordshire (Appendix 2).
- 5.18 Subject to approval of this report a Service Level Agreement will be agreed and signed by both parties.
- 5.19 A schedule of support groups will be maintained by the Council to assist with signposting in the future.

### **Clinically Extremely Vulnerable – Government Guidance (October 2020)**

#### **5.20 General**

Going to shops and pharmacies

Consider shopping or going to the pharmacy at quieter times of the day. You must wear [face coverings](#) in all shops unless you are exempt.

You might also want to ask friends, family or volunteers to collect medicines for you.

The NHS Volunteer Responders programme is available to help support those who need it. Volunteers can collect and deliver shopping, medication and other essential supplies. Call 0808 196 3646 between 8am and 8pm, 7 days a week to self-refer or visit [www.nhsvolunteerresponders.org.uk](http://www.nhsvolunteerresponders.org.uk) for further information.

### **High areas**

Going to shops and pharmacies

You are advised to significantly reduce your shopping trips. Where possible, you should consider shopping online. If you do need to go to the shops, try to do so at quieter times and maintain strict social distancing.

You are advised to ask people in your household or support bubble to collect food and medicines for you. If you need more help with accessing food or medicines, [NHS Volunteer Responder](#) are still available to assist you.

### **Very high areas**

#### **Shopping**

You are advised not to go to the shops. Use online shopping if you can, or ask others to collect and deliver shopping for you (friends and family, or [NHS Volunteer Responders](#)).

If you cannot access food, your local authority can offer support. You will receive further information about how to request support from your local authority in the shielding notification letter we will send to you if your area is advised to shield.

#### **Medicines**

You are strongly advised not to go to a pharmacy because the risk of exposure to the virus is significantly higher in your area.

If friends and family are not able to collect your medicines for you, then you will be eligible for free medicines delivery. Please contact your pharmacy to inform them that you are clinically extremely vulnerable and need your medicines delivered, and they will arrange this free of charge.

- 5.21 At the time of writing this Report the County Council have scheduled a Second Wave Planning Meeting (22.10.2020).

The latest guidance also confirms *“In line with outbreak management planning, upper tier councils should take the lead in making plans and co-ordinating outcomes data, working with lower tier councils – which in many areas have played an important role in delivering support for CEV individuals”*.

The Head of Service will provide Members with a verbal update on the outcome of discussion with the County Council.

The Council are reviewing staffing resources required to handle additional calls should a major incident be declared.

**6 Implications****6.1 Financial**

The estimated cost of the Hub operation from March to July was £90,000, mainly in salary costs of staff re-assigned to Hub work plus a small amount spent on food stock. Surplus food has been donated to a local charity for distribution to those in need.

There are financial implications as set out in this report. Grant allocation of £8.350 to Support Staffordshire to fund 5 additional hours per week.

No specific provision exists for the grant to Support Staffordshire and will require Cabinet approval. The expenditure reflects the Council's response to COVID-19 and if approved will be reflected in the monthly returns to MHCLG.

**6.2 Legal**

LRF/emergency response powers and duties/ Covid-19 Act.

**6.3 Human Resources**

None.

**6.4 Section 17 (Crime Prevention)**

None.

**6.5 Human Rights Act**

None.

**6.6 Data Protection**

Data management and confidentiality issues were overseen by the Council's Information Manager.

**6.7 Risk Management**

The risk of fraudulent calls on support was managed by an assessment of needs on a case by case basis by Housing Officers.

**6.8 Equality & Diversity**

None.

**6.9 Best Value**

During the course of the work, Officers who were unable to undertake their normal duties were re-assigned to undertake "safe and well" phone calls to local people and to inform them about the support available from the Council and others. This ensured that Officers were able to continue to contribute to this high priority work of the Council.

**7 Appendices to the Report**

Appendix 1: Cannock Chase Coronavirus Emergency Response – system diagram

Appendix 2: VCSE Pledge for Local Authorities.

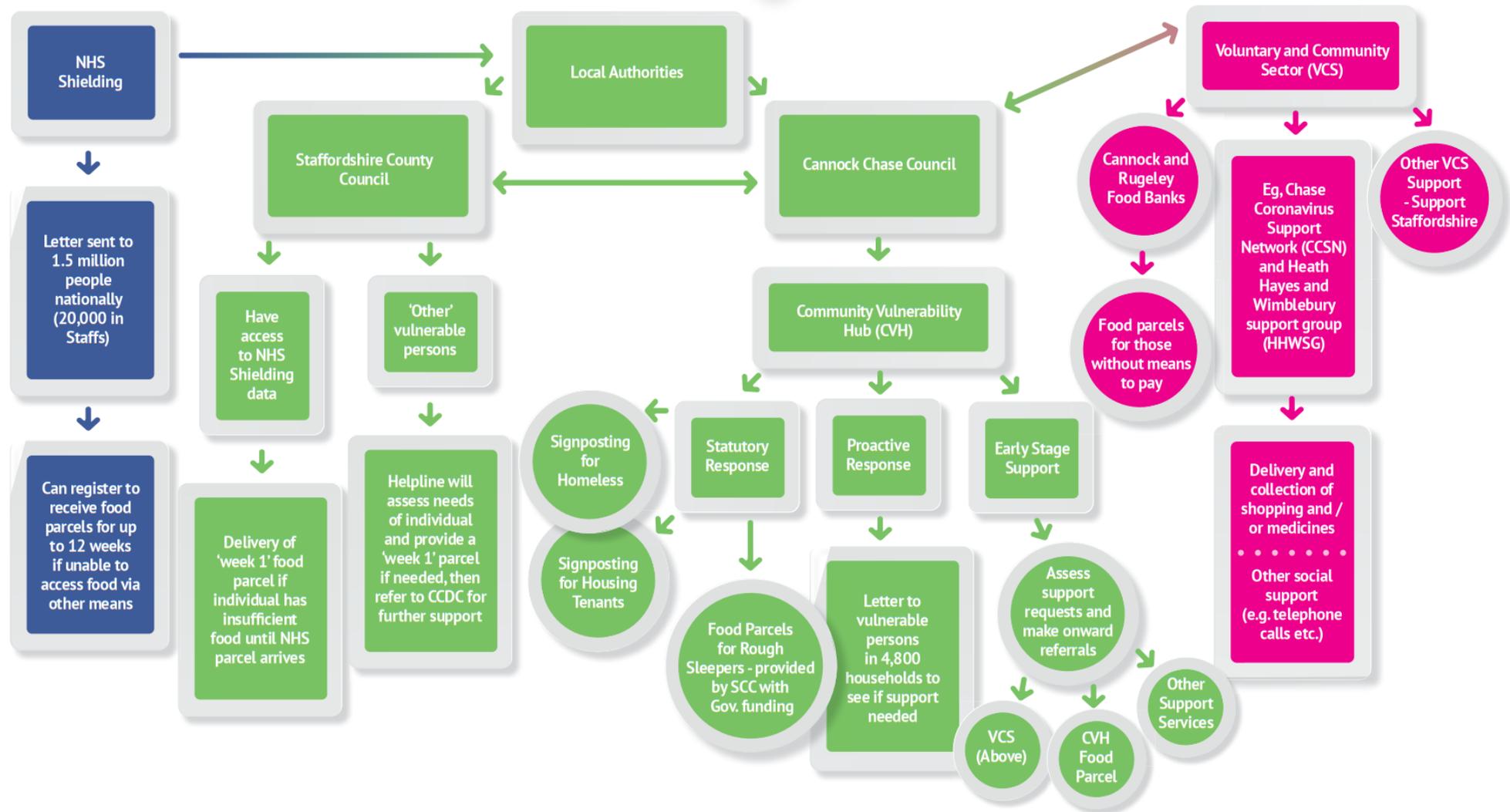
**Previous Consideration**

None

**Background Papers**

None

# Cannock Chase Coronavirus Emergency Response





## Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector Pledge for Local Authorities

- a. We recognise and value the critical role of the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector in the local community, including but not limited to providing an important array of local services to our residents.
- b. We share many aims for improving the lives of local people, with the VCSE sector and as such commit to working together where possible, to achieve those joint aims.
- c. We recognise the role of VCSE organisations in providing insight and connecting us to communities of place, interest and identity with whom we may wish to consult and collaborate. We will do our best to engage the sector in a fair and timely manner.
- d. Where we seek formal representation from the sector we will do so in a fair, transparent and accountable manner.
- e. We recognise that in some cases, from time to time, some VCSEs may disagree with particular public policies or the ways in which we decide to deliver services. We recognise their independence from statutory and political structures and their right to disagree. Where possible we will continue to work with such organisations in a mutually constructive way, bearing in mind the wider aims which we may share.
- f. We recognise that many charities, larger community organisations and social enterprises are professional organisations delivering high quality services and should be thought of as businesses and employers as well as 'voluntary sector', especially in terms of local economic planning.
- g. Where we commission, procure or contract with the VCSE sector, we will do so in a fair, proportionate and transparent way. Where relevant we will include in our procurement proper measures of social value in addition to value for money, including where appropriate 'buying local'. Where appropriate we will use innovative forms of procurement rather than relying upon the standard competitive tender alone.
- h. As a large and complex 'sector' we recognise the value of working closely with relevant umbrella bodies from Team Staffordshire, to maximise our ability to have a wide and open dialogue with as much of the VCSE sector as possible.

Garry Jones  
Chief Executive  
Support Staffordshire

Cllr George Adamson  
Leader of the Council  
Cannock Chase District Council

Dated: XXst XXXX 2020

