

Member Briefing

Number: 1442

Title: COVID-19 – Emergency food response

Summary: Overview of food support to shielded and vulnerable residents in west Cheshire

Background

The Community Response Cell is co-ordinating several key workstreams in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes volunteering, engagement with voluntary, charity and community partners, community funding and food liaison to ensure that the most vulnerable residents across west Cheshire are supported.

Working closely with the Shielding Cell, we have developed an emergency food response for shielded and vulnerable residents. Through working with our commissioned services, charitable and voluntary organisations and community groups we have developed a collaborative solution to ensuring the most vulnerable residents can access the food and wider support that they need.

What is happening – please see attached diagram (1442 – Vulnerable Food Diagram)

Shielding Residents

Cheshire West and Chester Council is providing an emergency food response to support those residents who have been identified as needing to shield for 12 weeks by the government and who have requested food help.

Our initial response has included calling all those identified and notified to us through the national shielding helpline. Following the initial contact to identify need, we are providing a telephone number for them to contact us directly. We have implemented an emergency food distribution hub, managed by a team of Council staff, with basic emergency food parcels delivered to shielded residents supported by Cheshire Fire Service, Qwest and Brio.

Socially isolated, vulnerable residents and individuals and families experiencing food poverty

In addition, through working collaboratively with voluntary and community groups, our HELP scheme and engaging with food banks, we are supporting vulnerable and isolated residents to ensure they have access to food during the COVID-19 pandemic.

For residents experiencing difficulties in accessing food we have focused key information and support online at: www.livewell.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk and set up a Cheshire West Coronavirus Helpline on: 0300 123 7031, available seven days a week, from 8am to 7pm. This is supported by a virtual community support hub that contacts residents who have complex needs and signposts appropriately or supports residents to self-serve. Both the Livewell website and the Helpline number are supported by a significant communications campaign.

Residents requiring financial assistance can continue to apply online for financial and wider support via our HELP scheme.

In addition, residents who may just require additional guidance and signposting are also encouraged to visit the [Livewell website](#) for details of shopping and delivery services provided by organisations and community groups in their local area.

When it is happening

To date: 3,693 calls handled by contact centre, **1,572** calls into our Helpline, **141** Foodbank Vouchers issued, **620** emergency food parcels delivered, more than **1,600** people have pledged their support by registering to volunteer, nearly **800** of these volunteers have been allocated to support locally, **38** funding applications approved through Combined Cheshire West Community Response Fund and Westminster Foundation Fund.

Shielding residents who have been instructed to isolate for 12 weeks

The Emergency Food Hub operates from 9am to 5pm from Monday to Friday and from 10am to 2pm on Saturdays and Sundays. Requests for support received via the contact centre are processed by the food hub, basic emergency food hampers are collated and processed and delivered as soon as possible by Cheshire Fire Service. Residents receive a phone call to confirm delivery in advance of distribution. Deliveries are made safely to the doorstep in line with social distancing measures and government guidance.

Emergency food hampers are likely to contain enough dried, ambient and fresh food to last for seven days (where supplies are available). Outside of basic dietary requirements, hampers will be prepared on the basis of providing balanced and nutritional meals and according to stock available. Some specific dietary requirements are accommodated ie vegetarian and diabetic. Bespoke orders are not possible.

Socially isolated, vulnerable residents and individuals and families experiencing food poverty

We have collated and are continuing to add content to the [Livewell website](#) for details of shopping and delivery services provided by organisations and community groups in the local area.

Contact made via the Cheshire West Coronavirus Helpline 0300 123 7031, if not resolved at first point of contact, are directed to the virtual community support hub where they will be referred to the appropriate service, commissioned service, local organisation or community group.

Those residents who have no food and have no means to buy food as a result of financial hardship or who may require a delivery for a specific reason may be eligible for a food hamper via Food Banks or a pre-loaded food card through our HELP scheme, for more information visit the [HELP pages on the Council website](#). Alternatively, digital vouchers may be issued by text message or email within 24 hours of receiving the request subject to the appropriate checks being made.

Additional Support Information

- A third party (eg a carer or community / voluntary sector organisation) can call the Helpline or on someone else's behalf as long as they have permission to share their contact details and other information.
- Callers to the Helpline will be asked to identify whether they have been advised that they need to be shielded. A GP letter has been circulated to patients identified as part of the shielding cohort. All patients who have received this letter and are requiring support are being asked to register at: www.gov.uk/coronavirus-extremely-vulnerable or ring the national helpline number 0800 028 8327 in the first instance. Data is then passed to the local authority.
- If residents identify that they need additional support and/or practical advice about benefits or other issues, they will be referred to other agencies, depending upon the types of need and who can best meet their needs – the appropriate service, commissioned service, local organisation or community groups.
- Referrals from the Virtual Support Hub are only made with agreement from the resident and subject to the capacity of the commissioned service, local organisation or community group. This is checked in advance of a referral being made.
- If residents wish to pay or would like to access a shopping or delivery service in their area rather than receive an emergency food hamper, the [Livewell website](#) provides a list of what help is available.
- HELP scheme Paypoint vouchers can be issued via text or email through the HELP scheme for people in financial hardship following a basic check undertaken by the Council in line with arrangements previously in place in respect of issuing food vouchers. If the resident does not have a smart phone or email address, a paper printout of the voucher will be delivered to their address by the Council's welfare team.
- HELP scheme pre-loaded Supermarket Gift Cards for a local supermarket may also be offered. Voucher amounts will normally be as follows, depending upon the circumstances:
 - £30 single person
 - £50 couple
 - £70 1 child in household
 - £80 2 children in household
 - £90 3 children in household
 - £100 4 or more children in household

- Firmstep is being utilised to provide case management from requests submitted via the call centre to referrals to the Virtual Support Hub. This ensures that the process is driven and supported by appropriate insight and intelligence.
- We will continually monitor data to continue to review capacity, resources and workflow.

Action for Members

Please promote our [Livewell website](#) to all residents to access support information and to community organisations to promote their support. Also, please share the helpline number: 0300 123 7031 for vulnerable people who do not have access to friends, family or neighbours for support. Further communications regarding Livewell and our Helpline will continue to be shared.

For further information, contact: Rachel Foster, Senior Manager - Community Response Cell

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Responsible Committee, Cabinet Member: Councillor Louise Gittins

Date: 17 April 2020