

Agenda item 4

For information - Update on the services provided by FTC during the Covid 19 lockdown.
Author: Cllr Rich Ackroyd, Leader of the Council

Cllrs will be aware of the information provided below but I thought it might be useful "for the record" to list the services FTC has been provided following the lockdown.

Perhaps the most significant point to make is the speed at which FTC Cllrs and staff moved to put services in place. We already had an emergency plan that was dusted off and amended to apply to the situation. We established the Emergency Group and various What's App groups to ensure clear communications within FTC and beyond within a matter of days. Before the lockdown, we hosted a series of meetings for venues in the town, with the CAB, Fair Frome and Mendip Health Connections, as well as with colleagues on other Councils - all designed to understand what other organisations were planning to do or what problems they were likely to face and to see if FTC could help. These early meetings informed a lot of what we subsequently implemented. One of the positives to arise has been the way so many of the organisations and individuals in the town pulled together so quickly to help one another. This is something we must try to retain when / if things get back to normal.

Within a week of the lockdown, we had a support phone line in place and a bank of staff and Cllrs ready to answer calls. This signposting service provided and continues to provide information to the community on anything from when the bins will be emptied to matching up a very vulnerable person with a volunteer to provide essential food or prescriptions. Volunteers delivered to every household in the town an information leaflet that focussed on our campaign to get to know your five nearest neighbours. Within two weeks, we had a raft of web based information targeted at businesses, families, general FAQs and advice and information on managing domestic finance. Click on our website at frometowncouncil.gov.uk and see the Quick Links on the left hand side for more community information we are providing.

Behind the scenes, we swiftly moved the staff from the Town Hall to working at home, established group telephone and video conferencing facilities while maintaining a prestigious output of timely posts on social media and on our noticeboards.

We now have a bank of over 300 volunteers willing, able and DBS checked who are providing a food delivery service (complementing Fair Frome's food bank), a prescription delivery service (we have commissioned Frome Community Drivers for this) and, where necessary a bespoke service for vulnerable individuals.

Looking forward, I suggest it seems crucial that we maintain these services as long as necessary and begin to reflect on lessons learnt, on what changes have happened that need to be remedied or retained and to begin to understand what the "new normals" are likely to be.

It remains a very difficult period for so many in the town. There are households that continue to struggle financially as well as households that find themselves unexpectedly struggling. There are those who are struggling with the effects of isolation and loneliness and there are

many more who see a very uncertain future. FTC is well placed to begin to understand these challenges and explore how they can be minimised.