

Agenda item 6

For Decision - Covid-19: 2nd Wave / Local Lockdown planning

Author: Kate Hellard, Community Development Manager

Summary

Together with our partners, we are currently planning for the possibility of a second wave of Covid-19, including the possibilities of local and or national restrictions. This report provides a brief summary of our work to date in supporting Frome residents through the first stages of the Covid-19 pandemic, offers a summary of the current situation and considers the possible impacts of a second wave and subsequent local and or national restrictions. It recommends that financial support to Active and In Touch and Fair Housing for Frome as match funding to two projects in preparation for future impacts of Covid-19.

Summary of First Wave support

In March 2020, Frome Town Council redeployed our entire staff team to set up and support the delivery of a town-wide response to Covid-19. We played a particular role in delivering a communications campaign that encouraged residents to *Check in on their nearest 5 neighbours*; set up and delivered Fruber Eats; emergency food parcel and prescription deliveries and the Shop for Me volunteer a bespoke shopping service. We also ensured our telephone line was appropriately staffed for an increase in calls with specific Covid related information readily available to members of our staff team answering calls.

In addition, we have continued to support local organisations and businesses with information, advice, and practical considerations to enable them to trade, deliver and promote their services and where appropriate move online.

At the same time, we have managed our own responsibilities as an employer; supporting our staff team to work remotely at home. The Rangers have worked throughout the pandemic and the lockdown to look after our public parks and open spaces; albeit with different priorities and – at the start of the lockdown – on a skeleton crew basis. Likewise, we have looked after the Town Hall with a skeleton crew, reflecting our commitments and responsibilities as a landlord.

Whilst managing and delivering our Covid-19 response we also ensured that we continued to deliver key aspects of our original work programme.

Current Intermediate support

Communications

From March onwards, the FTC communications team have provided responsive and timely support to the residents of Frome; two information leaflets have been produced and delivered to every household in the town, a series of information banners have been designed produced and displayed across the town, social media and other channels have been used effectively to communicate; changes in local support services, national guidelines and changes to restrictions and accessible information about local shop reopening, Eat Out for Less.

The FTC telephone line remains open and is staffed remotely Monday to Thursday 9am – 5pm and Friday 9am – 4pm. We continue to take calls from residents seeking information and advice about local support services, covid-19 specific enquiries and in recent weeks we have seen an increasing number of housing related enquiries.

Throughout the last five months we have also provided second line support in order to ensure residents with more complex enquiries are supported, through a ring back service designed to ensure that the caller receives the most appropriate advice and is supported to access partner services such as Active and In Touch befriending, bespoke advice and support from Mendip Health Connections and other services provided by partner organisations.

Fruber Eats-Emergency food parcels

During the first few weeks of lockdown food supplies were nationally impacted and many local residents found themselves without the basics. This, paid for, service was set up to ensure that residents were not left without food. In recent weeks we have received a small number of requests for these paid for emergency food parcels from residents told to self-isolate (either displaying symptoms or as a result of contact with a confirmed case).

Shop For Me

This volunteer supported shopping service for shielding residents has matched over 70 volunteers with recipients supporting them with regular, bespoke, shopping. As shielding is now paused all recipients have been contacted by a member of our team to assess their current situation. 19 paired users and volunteers are continuing support despite shielding restrictions being lifted. 47 recipients will want to resume/continue using the volunteer service in the case of a second lockdown.

Partnership working

We have continued to meet with a small local Covid-19 response team including Active and In Touch, Mendip Health Connections, Frome Community Drivers, and a Neighbourhood Network representative.

We have also kept in close contact with MDC and other partners across the area to ensure our work to support local organisations, businesses and residents is complementary and not doubling local efforts.

In addition to regular newsletters to businesses, community organisations, neighbourhood network and volunteers, we have attended other network meetings with the Fair Frome referrers group, venues, and businesses to maintain a good level of local knowledge and support.

What next?

Based on a household survey and a series of panels, some recommendations to support recovery have emerged which were reported to Town Matters Committee on 5 August. The Management Group is currently considering how these ideas can be financed alongside a more wide-ranging review of the Work Programme with a report expected to be presented to the next Council meeting in November for decision.

In the coming months we can anticipate a rise in unemployment as the furlough scheme comes to an end. As payment holidays and the evictions ban come to an end, we can also expect a rise in tenant evictions and more difficulties in keeping up with mortgage payments. We are working with MDC and SCC and preparing for a rise in homelessness, poor mental health, and other associated issues for residents. Our telephone line is now receiving an increase in housing queries.

It is possible that this situation will be worsened if there is a local outbreak resulting in local restrictions and/or wider national restrictions. Whilst some of our independent shops and businesses have reported they have managed well over recent months they, and the wider tourist and entertainment industries, are likely to be negatively impacted by more restrictions. In addition, we are maintaining close contact with local schools to ensure we understand issues faced by teachers, children, young people and their families and expect to have a better idea of these in the coming weeks and months as the new term settles.

In order to prepare for autumn, we are compiling factual assessments of need as our current assumptions are very much based on discussion and projection.

Fair Housing for Frome are proposing to commission a housing needs survey which will provide a more accurate account of the housing issues in Frome. MDC have confirmed £5k of match funding towards this and FHfF are applying to Somerset Community Foundation and other potential funders to reach a target of £16k in order to commission an organisation approved by MDC to complete the survey. We will allocate £2k match funding from our existing Support for Community Organisations budget line.

In preparation for the event of a second wave and or local outbreak we have reviewed the SCC Local Outbreak Plan and worked with MDC to consider areas of particular local need. We are working with partners to ensure:

- Testing centre: a suitable site is identified and included in the SCC Local Outbreak Plan
- Services such as the Fair Frome Food Bank, Frome Community Drivers Prescription delivery and Active and In Touch befriending have capacity to meet increased demand
- Businesses, arts, and entertainment venues are well supported and resilient
- Community and voluntary organisations are supported to manage increased demand and new challenges to service delivery

We are continuing to work with partners to develop the following practical support for residents:

- Pop up Information point: due to an increase in demand for information, advice and support FTC are currently working with Fair Housing for Frome to support the set up of a pop up information point which would offer a space for a number of organisations to work under one roof in a central venue.
- Shop for Me: we are working to hand over the bespoke volunteer shopping service to Active and in Touch in order that they can continue to support residents who benefit on an ongoing service and in preparation for future shielding restrictions. It is proposed that we provide £2k match funding for this project from EMR 318.

- Family Connect: as you will see in the report on our work to support children, young people and families, we are prioritising this project to ensure families and practitioners have access to up to date information, advice and support about local services and referral mechanisms.
- Business support: we are working with partners to monitor the impact of Covid-19 on local businesses paying attention to support for independent traders in Frome and large high risk businesses.
- Effective town-wide communications: we will continue to provide detailed and comprehensive communications to support residents, businesses, and local organisations. In the event of a local outbreak this would include an omni channel campaign delivered in the same way as the initial Covid-19 campaign.
- Access to our parks and open spaces: the Rangers are continuing to work hard to ensure the high standards of maintenance and upkeep across all of our sites; whilst adopting safe and sensible working practices that reflect the Government's current guidance
- Neighbourhood Networks: through Lottery funding we have increased our capacity to support the growth of neighbourhood networks and will continue to do so in the coming months.
- Access to Frome Town Hall: tenants are now working out of Frome Town Hall and we are now open for wedding ceremonies and other bookings. We continue to work on a plan to bring more staff back into the building in a safe and well managed environment. These incremental steps lead the way to future opportunities for the building to be used as a meeting venue and for more general use by the general public.

In the event of a local lockdown, rise in cases or national restrictions we, FTC, would follow a similar format to the first wave. However, we would be able to deliver all of these aspects of support for Frome in a quicker time period.

It is possible that the issues faced by the town in the coming months will be more complex and as we move from anecdotal to factual information through the housing needs survey and work with schools and other partners we will continue to adapt our recovery plan accordingly.

Recommendations

1. Note the report
2. Approve a virement of £2k from EMR 318 Community Development Work to cost centre 804 Emergency Expenses, to assist A&IT in taking over the Shop for Me administration.