**Wem Store Cupboard – Covid 19 Support Report**

Agenda item

**11**

**Introduction**

Wem Store Cupboard is a small group comprised of representatives from the following organisations Wem Town Council, Wem Eating Well Project, Incredible Edibles, Wem Youth Club and Whitchurch Food Bank. The group has been meeting regularly during the lockdown and co-ordinating a localised food support service.

**Work to date**

Since the lockdown on the 23rd March 2020 the group through the Town Clerk have worked closely with Housing Officers, Mental Health Support Workers, Social Workers, Thomas Adams and St Peters staff to identify residents in need of food support and provide the appropriate support for their needs. This has varied from a one off food parcel to the provision of regular hot meals. The group has been able to support residents from outside of the town including Whixall and Wem Rural.

Examples of the work carried out to date are outlined below;

**Emergency Support**

* Supply and delivery of one off emergency food support packages to residents before signposting them to Whitchurch Food Bank. In one case an emergency food and basic provisions pack was provided to an extremely vulnerable homeless person before they were rehoused at very short notice.
* All the perishable food received from the food hub is advertised on facebook for collection or distributed via volunteers.

**One Off Support**

* Supply and delivery of food parcels on request to free school meal recipients from both Thomas Adams and St Peters over the Easter holidays.
* Supply and delivery of homemade cakes to celebrate VE Day to residents in independent living homes and other identified individuals.

**Longer term support**

* Supply and delivery of frozen ready meals as a supplement to basic food supplies to those identified by officers from various agencies as being in need of support. It is estimated 72 food parcels (including emergency food parcels) have been delivered .
* Referral of those considered to be in need of a free hot meal delivered twice a week. Examples of recipients include residents referred by various agencies or who have contacted the council direct. To date 265 hot meals have been funded and delivered through the Bistro.

**Funding**

To date the work of the group has been funded by private donations and small grants/reimbursements including grants from Tesco, Wem Rotary, Wem Co-op and Connexus. Over £1000 has been spent on food support locally since the start of lockdown and this does not include direct donations given for the provision of the delivered hot meals.

Applications have been submitted to national grant bodies to enable the group to provide extra local support to those in need.

**Future needs**

Whilst the most severe part of the current lockdown period is coming to an end, the group is now planning for the future and it is anticipated that the need for food support will continue to grow due to;

* Increases in the number of people being made redundant following the reopening of businesses with reduced staff numbers.
* The reduction in the amount of Government support for the furlough scheme from August 2020.

To address these issues the group has identified areas where it anticipates support will be required

**Short Term**

**Information Provision**

The crisis has shown the need to ensure that the most vulnerable in the community receive information on the many services being offered to those in need, as not everyone in the town uses or has access to the internet. With the closure of the libraries many residents have had no access to the internet at all. The anticipated economic recession will mean there will be a continuing need to provide information on support available.

One suggestion is the production of a further information leaflet as a follow up to the two previous leaflets distributed by the Town Council – this one will focus on the support that is available for residents suffering from financial hardship, loneliness and mental health issues. To minimise risk to all and ensure that all residents receive a copy it is recommended that this leaflet is mailed out to all residents. A grant request has been submitted to the Police and Crime Commissioner to fund the production and distribution of this leaflet.

**Summer Food Support**

The need for this will continue, though the Government’s announcement that free school meal provision will continue over the summer is very positive, there are residents who will not qualify for free school meal support or who could be unexpectedly made redundant and find themselves in need of support.

**Medium to Long Term**

The crisis has identified that there is a demand and need for the delivery of subsidised hot meals similar to the old meals on wheels service. The hot meal delivery service offered during lockdown by various businesses in and around the town provided an enormous benefit to not only the recipients but also the relatives of some of the town’s most vulnerable residents who were reassured that their relatives were being catered for.

There is scope to develop a community meals delivery project that could not only support residents but could also provide a regular income to local cafes who could be given the opportunity to provide the meals on a weekly or monthly rota twice a week. There is already a model in the county of a community meals project run by a local council and this could be adapted to run just as easily in the town.

**Recommendations**

* That subject to funding being identified the Town Council produce a phase 3 leaflet as detailed in the report.
* That the Town Council continues to support the work of Wem Store Cupboard Group to develop new initiatives.