

Warm Hubs

Background

There is a nationwide agenda to tackle the problems associated with fuel poverty, but rural isolation presents a significant barrier to reaching many of those most in need. The overarching purpose of Warm Hubs is to help communities tackle social isolation and hardship whilst addressing issues of fuel poverty.

Warm Hubs are warm, safe places where local residents are welcome to come along and enjoy a regular inclusive community-run event. Where they can talk to other people over a hot drink and get practical tips and advice on saving energy costs and keeping safe and warm at home and where they can also find out how to access more specialist advice and support for their particular problems.

Several Unitary Councils across the UK are already running Warm Hubs, but to date there are none in Shropshire.

Requirements for a Warm Hub

- Funding
- Venue which is fit for purpose (including refreshment and toilet facilities)
- Meeting Day which fits in with other activities taking place in the Town
- Organisations to provide relevant information
- Publicity
- Volunteers to organise and run the sessions with support from Town Council staff

Venue Options

The following have been identified as potential venues:

- Baptist Church
- Methodist Church
- Parish Church Hall
- **Senior Club**
- Stage Door
- Town Hall
- **United Services Club**
- **Youth Club**

Venues in bold are preferred due to their location, availability and flexibility of space on offer

Meeting Day

Several weekday activities already take place within the Town and when these are considered, along with the days on which the library is open, **Friday morning** appears to be the best day for a Warm Hub to operate in the Town, as this will not impact on any other free activities held. It should be open from 9.15 a.m so that residents dropping children at school / nursery can then visit the hub direct if needed.

Organisations who May Get Involved

Keep Shropshire Warm is a partnership between Shropshire Council and Marches Energy Agency (MEA), which provides free advice. MEA have indicated that they will be able to provide support either by attending to give direct advice or through the provision of leaflets. Once a Warm Hub is up and running, attendees will identify the information and advice that they need, and appropriate organisations can then be approached by the Town Council staff.

It is hoped to involve Wem Store cupboard, Citizens Advice Bureau and the Food Hub with the project.

Volunteers

Volunteers will be crucial to the running of the sessions as they will be tasked with setting up the venue and providing refreshments as well as a listening ear. A minimum of 2 volunteers will be required per session.

Volunteers will require ongoing support and some training which could include dementia awareness, food safety, equality, and diversity, first aid etc. It is recognised that a lack of suitable, willing volunteers may prevent the project going ahead, but the provision of good support and training may act as an encouragement for volunteers to come forward.

If Councillors were able to volunteer their time on the project this would also be a good opportunity for the Council to action its Priority 1 in the action plan agreed in January 2022

“Engage more effectively with residents, particularly hard to reach groups including 18-30 year olds to develop services and facilities to meet community needs.”

Promotion

To ensure as many people as possible are aware of the project it should be promoted to every house. The best way to ensure as many residents as possible are aware of the initiative would be to send out a direct mailing in the same format as the Covid leaflets issued. This mailout can also contain advice and information on home insulation and energy saving (which will fit with the Council’s climate change remit), financial support, grants etc. The cost of this will be in the region of £1500 if posted, but would be significantly cheaper if hand delivered.

Costs and Funding

As Warm Hubs are run by volunteers, the direct costs associated with running a Warm Hub are limited to venue hire and refreshments - estimated to be around £70 per week. This activity may be covered by the Council’s existing public liability insurance. This will be confirmed when the venue and method of operating have been agreed.

Through informal discussions, Connexus has indicated that such a project may be eligible for Community funding and an application has been prepared and will be submitted if Members approve the project.

Item	Estimated cost
Room hire 26 weeks £60 per week	£1560
Refreshments £10 per week	£260
Promotion	£1700* (less if delivered by volunteers)
Contingency 10%	£350
Total	£3872
Connexus grant	£2500
Town Council	£1372 <i>(£1000 from small grants underspend and balance from climate change budget)</i>

*Figure based on cost of last posted covid leaflet £1453 and assuming cost increases.

Please note that without grant funding this project will not be able to go ahead.

Staff Time

The project will involve staff time in the recruitment and management of volunteers. There will undoubtedly be a need for Town Council staff to attend if insufficient volunteer cover cannot be found. This project can be overseen by the Projects Assistant.

Measuring Success

The project will be considered successful if it attracts and retains sufficient volunteers; has a core group of regular attendees; and both volunteers and those attending provide positive feedback.

Recommendation

Subject to available external funding being secured, the Town Council should agree to facilitate a pilot Warm Hub project running for 26 weeks from Autumn 2022.