



Covid-19

Cheshire West and Chester Council

Enabling and Empowering Communities

Working to help communities to support each other: matching volunteers with need; providing quick-to-access funding, open and accessible local information on the pandemic; and offering a place to share and celebrate the good work taking place

Context

Cheshire West and Chester Council focused on enabling and empowering communities to respond to the pandemic, helping them meet the huge demand for support which was more than any single organisation could tackle. This built on the Council's plan and its focus on 'Playing your Part' – encouraging and enabling more citizens to take an active role in their communities. It also built on the foundation put in place through the strong voluntary and community sector, the Council's 'localities working' approach and its recent investment in an online engagement portal.

Development

As West Cheshire prepared for lockdown, a request for volunteers drew in over 2,000 local people. The Council, with Health and Community and Voluntary Sector (CVS) partners such as Cheshire West Voluntary Action, began matching volunteers with requests for help whilst promoting the idea of mutual self-help within communities – neighbours supporting neighbours. The Coronavirus Community Response Fund was established, with the Westminster Foundation approaching the Council to match the Council's contribution of £250,000 and create a £500,000 fund. This helped fund community services and initiatives, enabling them to meet emergency needs. To support action planning, the Council management team commissioned public health, performance and economic analysts to develop a weekly data report on the local spread of the virus, as well as its impact on Council services and the local community. Alongside this, the Inspire Cheshire West website was created as a positive online space given over to local people to share their ideas for coping with lockdown, celebrate their communities and post a thank-you to those who had helped

them. These were also posted on social media where a call was made for people to share their stories and ideas.

Implementation

The Council worked with Qwest Services, which runs the Council's call centre, to telephone the vulnerable. It also established a virtual hub to receive and manage requests for support, liaising with local community and voluntary sector organisations about their offer and capacity to help. With some potentially vulnerable people not answering calls, a referral process was quickly developed, with Cheshire Fire Service making personal visits to ensure that all those in need of support received it. A food distribution centre was established, led by Council officers in a local leisure centre run by the Council but closed due to the pandemic. The food distribution centre received and distributed emergency food boxes supplied by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. The centre was run by redeployed Council staff, with deliveries made by Cheshire Fire Service. Once emergency food parcels stopped, subsequent parcels were put together with food purchased by the Council with generous donations from businesses such as Aldi, Nestle, Kuehne + Nagel Limited and Roberts Bakery. The Westminster Foundation and the Council, in liaison with Cheshire West Voluntary Action and funders across the borough, swiftly processed applications to the Community Response Fund. Grants were paid out within three days of application. The classifications for projects supported were:

- Multi-focused support
- Food support
- Older people's support
- Children and young people support
- Domestic abuse support
- Learning disabilities support
- Mental health support
- Health and wellbeing
- Befriending support
- Transport support.



The Inspire Cheshire West website was created as a positive online space where people could share ideas and thank you send messages.

Review

The contact centre made over 9,000 outbound calls to vulnerable and shielding residents, whilst responding to over 4,000 enquiries, of which over 2,000 were from vulnerable and shielding residents. Over 1,000 food parcels were delivered to shielding residents and the virtual hub has ensured support for over 4,000 people living alone and in isolation. In its first two weeks, the Inspire Cheshire West website received more than 1,500 unique visitors and over 100 separate stories and ideas were posted. The key to success was the co-operative approach taken across the Council, public and community and voluntary sectors, which partnered with individuals and organisations who volunteered to support those in need. The fast and effective partnership approach to overcoming issues has shown what is possible given an overwhelming common priority. The strength of the community response has also highlighted the potential for empowering local citizens to play a more prominent role. As a result the Council is developing a network of Community Champions who will play their part in keeping communities safe, sharing important information, advising residents and feeding back about progress.

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