



COVID-19

Telford and Wrekin Council

Developing Community Resilience

An existing set of partnerships – including Town and Parish Councils and the third sector – meant there was a strong network to mobilise support for vulnerable residents

Context

Across Telford & Wrekin there were vulnerable and self-isolating households who needed extra support through the lockdown period – especially those without family, neighbours or other social networks and who needed help obtaining food and medicines. They also needed social contact to address loneliness, anxiety and or other wellbeing issues. As a Co-operative Council, it recognised a duty of care to all vulnerable residents and made a clear commitment to use resources to provide support – for example by redeploying its workforce to new roles. The Council had willing partners, an established network of volunteers, and already had an established voice in the community to reach vulnerable residents.

Development

Over many years the Council had been working hard to build stronger, more resilient communities – working with individuals, communities, VCSE organisations and Town and Parish Councils. It also developed an effective approach to volunteering across the Council and within communities. This means partnership working was already well embedded, and this network could be mobilised quickly to offer support to the area's most vulnerable residents. The initiative involved working with a wide range of organisations, including Town and Parish Councils, Telford Crisis Support Network, Telford Interfaith Council, and local community centres. The Council is fortunate to have passionate and committed individuals in the third sector who, like the Council, are proud of their communities. They are dedicated to making their neighbourhoods the best they can be and have the desire to support other people so they can thrive. The Council trusts them to be experts in what they are doing – and by working together the activity ensured that any vulnerable resident, whatever their background, could access the support they needed.

Implementation

For shielding residents and other vulnerable households, the Council launched a dedicated Community Support Line that was open seven days a week. There was swift work to set up provisions across the borough, working with Town and Parish Councils, local community groups and volunteers, as well as local supermarkets and pharmacies. Help was given obtaining supplies, collecting pensions, gas/electricity top-ups, and walking dogs alongside 'safe and well calls'. Given the existing relationships in place, the Council was able to pick up the phone and ask organisations how they could support their community – and what they would need from the Council and other partners to help them do it. Many, of course, were already at work on the crisis. The Council was able to refer people to support in their own communities, which meant residents developed meaningful connections. By working together and involving Town and Parish Councils, local community groups and volunteers they were able to collectively ensure that any vulnerable resident, whatever their background, could access the support they needed during a very difficult time. During the lockdown, the Council came under additional funding pressures due to increased demand, so it provided additional funding for key partners. With many volunteers themselves forced to shield or self-isolate, the Council had to run a recruitment campaign at the start of lockdown; workplace furloughs and other restrictions meant there were a lot of people with free time for volunteering. Existing processes set up by the Council meant this new support was quickly up and running and could be sent where it was needed the most.



Review

In March, the Council wrote to 78,000 households with details of the dedicated Community Support Helpline. Direct support was provided to one in five households during lockdown. The Council recruited more than 1,100 community volunteers and worked with 80 voluntary and community groups. Through this response, relationships were deepened and improved among local community groups. A lot of new services have been developed by these groups to meet the crisis – while four new community groups have established who are keen to continue working together and helping local communities. Following its recent Residents Survey, 74% of respondents said that the support the Council provided during this pandemic was helpful and 75% of respondents think the leadership of the Council has done a good job. Strong communities are vitally important; the pandemic has shown how vital the community sector and individuals are – and how much they can achieve. The Council already had firm foundations, and has worked hard together to successfully support its communities. As the situation develops it has been reflecting on the lessons learnt from Covid and how it needs

to adapt to new ways of working and continue building resilience. Telford & Wrekin Council will continue investing in and supporting its communities and providing good links to the business sector, to help increase capacity. Its support and investment has been an essential part of the response to Covid-19 and it is determined to continue.

For further information contact:

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