

Cabinet Report – 15 July 2020

Community response to COVID-19

Portfolio: Councillor Gary Perry
Councillor Adrian Andrew

Related portfolios: All

Service(s): Resilient Communities and Money Home Job

Wards: All

Key decision: Yes

Forward plan: No

1. Aim

1.1 This report seeks to provide an update to Cabinet on progress in the Community response to COVID-19 and to set out the Council's next steps in relation to the next six months. The report will:

- Provide detail of operations to date;
- Celebrate the work of council staff, partner organisations, the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) and the Communities of Walsall;
- Provide details of plans for the next six to nine months;
- Provide details of alignment with Test, Track and Isolate and the Outbreak Management Plan;
- Set out a basic infrastructure to ensure preparedness for any future pandemic that requires emergency intervention on the scale of the COVID-19 threat, any future second wave or local lockdown.

2.0 Summary

2.1. The Council has been working with a wide range of partner organisations, in an attempt to help to minimise the spread of COVID-19. The Council has successfully applied a resilient communities approach, providing civic leadership, to mobilise a public response through our vibrant voluntary and community sector, in recognised locality 'hub' areas. The approach has successfully supported shielded or vulnerable residents in self-isolation to stay safely at home and provides essential food to individuals and families in financial hardship, without building long-term dependency on the Council. Lockdown measures have been eased and the national shielded scheme will be paused from the 1st August 2020. This has allowed the Council to review its own offering. The Council intends to cease the Sneyd, centralised food parcel operation at the end of July 2020. However the Council is seeking to keep in place key elements of infrastructure that has been critical to the council's community response to COVID-19. This infrastructure will be kept available in appropriate way either through pausing as with Sneyd or

supported to operate at a reduced level focusing on befriending services. There is a need to continue support to those that are vulnerable but do not meet the threshold for Adult Social Care support and Cabinet are being asked to agree funding of £64,939.00 to allow this support to operate for a further three month period through the four community hubs. There will be some localised criteria as part of this activity.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 That Cabinet notes the work of staff, partner organisations, the VCS and Communities in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and thanks all those who have assisted in the community response.
- 3.2 Notes the cessation of the Sneyd, central food parcel operation at the end of July 2020
- 3.3 That Cabinet approves the ongoing support of key infrastructure elements of the pandemic response in readiness for any potential second-wave or any local lockdown requirements;
 - Making Connections Walsall;
 - Community Hubs;
 - The network of Community Associations.
- 3.4 That Cabinet approves the support for Test, Trace and Isolate through Making Connections Walsall and Money, Home Job
- 3.5 That Cabinet approves expenditure of £64,939.00 for a three month initiative to support shielded residents who do not meet the criteria for support from Adult Social Care.

4. Report detail – Know

- 4.1 On the 22nd June 2020 Matt Hancock, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care announced changes in the shielding programme and lifted restrictions for many individuals who for medical reasons needed to remain in their own homes. From the 6th July 2020 there would be greater freedom for shielded individuals and from the 1st August 2020 a pause to the shielded scheme.
- 4.2 Aligned to the announcement by the Secretary of State decision the programme of support from the Council needed to change to the new circumstances. On initial review the following elements needed to be considered:
 - The future of emergency food supplies to those vulnerable or in hardship;
 - The future of befriending services to support Walsall residents;
 - Additional demands on Money, Home, Job;
 - Support for Test Track and Isolate and the Council's Outbreak Management Plan;
 - Preparedness for any second wave or future pandemic.

- 4.3 The Council is working with a range of statutory and voluntary sector partner organisations to help minimise the spread of COVID-19. To achieve this, the Council has applied a resilient communities approach, providing civic leadership to help mobilise a public response via the voluntary, and community sector, in four locality areas.
- 4.4 The existing 'Making Connections Walsall initiative' was expanded, to offer additional support for vulnerable residents and families who need to self-isolate during the Covid-19 emergency. This work was aligned to the Governments Shielding scheme which provided food parcels to those medically shielding with no other access to food provision.
- 4.5 West Midlands Fire Service act as the initial point of contact in relation to calls from the public. West Midland Fire Service have delivered an agile and responsive service during the period of this crisis
- 4.6 Four Community Hubs are now operating across the following areas:
- NORTH** - Bloxwich Community Partnership, (Bloxwich East, Bloxwich West, Birchills Leamore, Blakenall);
- EAST** - Manor Farm Community Association (Walsall Pelsall, Brownhills, Aldridge North, Rushall-Shelfield and Walsall Wood, Aldridge South, Streetly, Pheasey Park Farm);
- SOUTH** - Accord Age Matter's (St Matthews, Paddock, Palfrey, Pleck);
- WEST** - Old Hall Peoples Partnership (Bentley and Darlaston North, Darlaston South, Willenhall North, Short Heath, Willenhall South).
- 4.7 The Community Hub buildings are still not open to the public. They receive referrals via email or via the Making Connections telephone line (which is answered by the West Midlands Fire Brigade). The main types of support offered by the 4 Community Hubs are:
- Befriending (telephone calls to people who need support or are lonely);
 - Shopping (which residents pay for)
 - Collection of prescriptions
 - Delivery of food parcels (only for individuals in significant financial hardship or isolating in line with Government guidance)
 - Other types of support for individuals in crisis e.g. collecting and delivering of free school meals / vouchers for families self-isolating, arranging emergency boiler repairs, welfare benefits and financial advice are also offered (where appropriate).
- 4.8 The West Midlands Fire Service has provided a range of support during the Covid-19 pandemic from the operation of the Making Connections Walsall support line to supporting our front line including delivery of food parcels and prescriptions. The telephone service has proved flexible and responsive to change, particularly in the early days of the Councils response to COVID-19.

- 4.9 The Community Hubs are being supported by a network of other community sector organisations, public and private organisations operating within locality areas. A team of dedicated volunteers are giving up their time to help and staff have also been re-deployed from the Council and from other partner organisations to support the civic response. One Walsall has been involved in the recruitment and selection of new volunteers and the Community Hubs have also used their existing volunteer databases. Many voluntary sector organisations have changed their focus to support those in need including Neighbourhood watch organisations, community centres and homeless support groups. The support of our supermarkets, including local shops and food suppliers has been essential in delivering during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 4.10 The approach has been designed to support shielded or vulnerable residents in self-isolation to stay safely at home, without building long-term dependency on the Council. It is hoped that taking this approach will help to build long lasting connections between local residents, enhancing community cohesion and helping to reduce social isolation for vulnerable people. The service is primarily aimed at individuals aged over 70 who have been advised by the government to self-isolate for 12 weeks. It also provides support to other vulnerable people believed to be at significant risk of contracting Covid-19 and individuals and families who are required to self-isolate due to a family member contracting the virus. Where individuals have family members or friends who can offer practical support with collecting food or prescriptions they are encouraged to access that help in the first instance.
- 4.11 This project has provided support for vulnerable people across the borough. The support has had a local focus and the model has been fine-tuned by local communities to meet their needs.
- 4.12 The project has made a major difference to people's circumstances with many stories that have shown how valuable the project has been. Some of the stories are listed in appendix (A)
- 4.13 The relaxation of lockdown has enabled a re-focus of our services to ensure they are aligned to need.
- 4.14 The current demands through Making Connections Walsall is detailed in the following table;

Week ending	Total referrals	Number of new shopping requests	Number of new befriending requests	Number of new bespoke shopping	Number of new food parcel requests	Number of new prescription requests	Other, please provide examples	Total new activities
1.7.2020								
Thursday	6	1	0	0	4	0	1	6
Friday	68	3	4	0	65	13	3	88
Saturday	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sunday	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Monday	60	6	2	0	51	6	4	69
Tuesday	50	2	1	0	42	3	1	49
Wednesday	44	6	0	0	34	3	4	47

Total	228	72	41	0	196	25	13	259
Previous 7 days	296	31	17	0	230	20	54	352
	-68	41	24	0	-34	5	-41	-93
% Change	-23%	132%	141%	0%	-15%	25%	-76%	-26%
Cumulative total	8719	1841	1394	1	5486	1090	1353	11225

Demand for food parcels through the Community hubs has reduced and continues to reduce significantly from its peak of 900 per week in April 2020 to under two hundred during the week ending 1st July 2020. Demand is still expected to continue to fall. The main cause of this reduction is:

- Easing of lockdown;
- Individuals making their own arrangements;
- Increase in supermarket slot availability;
- Increased access to food-banks;
- The flow of benefits to families and their maximisation.

In addition boxes have been issued outside of the Making Connections Walsall infrastructure to organisations in Palfrey, Darlaston, Willenhall and Rycroft to support a neighbourhood offering.

In consultation with the portfolio holder a decision was made to extend the Sneyd operation until the end of July 2020. The preparation of food parcels at Sneyd currently takes four hours per week. This does not mean that support will end and there will be support available supermarket on-line shopping services and some services will give priority access or befriending support to go to the shops. It is important to note that the Sneyd operation is capable of being reinstated at relatively short notice subject to available food supplies.

One of the key parts of the Council's response to the COVID-19 is the volunteering of Council staff to take on different roles. This flexibility from our employees has been fantastic and recognised. Our staff remain a key asset for the Council and exemplify public service amongst our employees.

- 4.15 The easing of lockdown provisions by Government has created new challenges for our communities. Individuals who have not left their homes for a considerable period are now being encouraged to take a big step and start the return to normality. In some instances this can be incredibly challenging and the Resilient Communities approach is ideally placed to provide support either through an extended befriending service or through practical support during a transition period.
- 4.16 Whilst at this stage it can only be an estimate, by the end of July spend on food is expected to be £499,530.00. Included in this figure is the cost of preparation of an emergency supply of 1000 boxes containing long shelf life, non-perishable goods for use in the event of emergency, local lockdown or a potential second wave of the virus.
- 4.17 The Government expect Councils to keep strong links with vulnerable and shielded residents. They still require Councils to provide this support though lockdown

measures are relaxing. There is a large cohort of residents who do not meet criteria for access to Adult Social Care services and the Making Connections Walsall hubs have been asked to manage the social contact and basic needs element of the shielded work. The costs associated with this work are £64,939.00 for three months between August and October 2020. The largest individual value for an individual community hub for this work for the period is £19,000.00.

Internal staff have been utilised to this point however these staff need to return to their substantive roles. This link will further embed a resilient communities offering and gain additional benefits from a closer working relationship so this investment will mitigate against future additional costs.

Whilst the support for shielded residents is very much aligned to the befriending service offered through Making Connections Walsall it does have a specific focus around support for those who are vulnerable and in need of support but do not meet the threshold for support through Adult Social Care. This initiative should help reduce demand on ASC. In addition the system will need to be able to report back to central government on key issues impacting this specific cohort.

- 4.18 The economic impact of COVID-19 remains a focus both nationally and locally. There have been a number of major initiatives put in place nationally during the lockdown period and announced in the Chancellor's Summer Economic Update on the 8th July 2020. Initiatives such as the "Furlough scheme" have had a positive impact on job retention. However, we are still expecting increased pressure in the system.
- 4.19 The impact of COVID-19 on benefits, finances, housing and jobs is highlighted in appendix (B). Some of the key issues identified are as follows:
- Universal credit claims across the West Midlands rose by 21% in May 2020;
 - Housing eviction freeze ends in August 2020;
 - Housing benefit claims were running at a weekly average of 107 in January and February increased to a weekly average of 285 in April;
- 4.20 On 18th March 2015, Cabinet approved a local Crisis Support Scheme that offers emergency assistance to individuals impacted by financial crisis and hardship. The scheme is usually administered by the Money Home Job team via the First Stop Shop or via the Housing and Welfare Support telephone line and delivered with significant support from the local voluntary and community sector. The closure of the First Stop shop has meant that many requests for emergency crisis assistance are now going through the Making Connections system and into the Community Hubs. Whilst there is already a non-recurrent grant budget aligned to the Crisis Support fund, which has been used to help support the Community Hubs to date, the unprecedented increase in demand for food during Covid-19 means that this money will soon run out. The provision of food parcels and other services has mitigated some of the pressure on the Crisis Support Scheme however the financial pressures and ongoing demands on Money, Home, Job will be monitored on an ongoing basis.

There have been some positive conversations with Money, Home, Job, Adult Social Care and Childrens services looking at further embedding community hubs within operational delivery.

Any balances in relation to the food budget of £733,000 approved by Cabinet on the 19th May 2020 will continue to be used for supporting vulnerable residents mainly through the Money, Home. Currently that balance is expected to be £130,463.00.

4.21 Test, Trace and Isolate

Walsall Council, through the Director of Public Health, has a statutory duty for the protection of the health of the local population (Health and Care Act 2013). In Walsall the Outbreak/Incident Management Team (OIMT) has been set up to manage the response involving relevant national, regional and local partners. This come under the governance of the Health and Wellbeing Board with the purpose to protect the public by identifying the source/cause of an infection and implement the necessary control measures to prevent further spread or recurrence.

The local control plan, with an on-call public health support team operating 8am-8pm 7 days a week, links the 3 tier response structure at the local, regional and nation levels. The local control plan follows the national guidance focusing on the following 7 themes; care homes and schools, high risk places, locations and communities, local testing capacity, contact tracing in complex settings, data integration, vulnerable people and a local governance structure.

Following a positive test the NHS Test and Trace service, utilising technology and contact tracers, will ask individuals to share details of people with whom they have had close and recent contact. Close contact means; face to face contact at less than 1 metre distance, spending 15 minutes within 2 metres of someone, travelling in a vehicle with someone and spending time in a setting (workplace, school, GP surgery etc.).

These individuals will be contacted and asked to isolate or 14 days since their last contact with the individual who has tested positive. Their household do not need to isolate but are required to follow the guidance of no contact, social distancing and frequent hand washing.

The Community response team have supported Public Health to ensure that there is appropriate connectivity with between the two areas of work. This connectivity is aligned to established infrastructure and governance already in place and is able to react with agility to different scenarios.

4.22 It is prudent for the Council to ensure that planning for the winter includes a potential for a COVID-19 second wave. Current planning includes the following critical infrastructure.

Making Connections Walsall – Provides the ability for residents to access support below the Adult Social Care threshold. A contract is in place until December 2020. The Council are currently reviewing how this type of infrastructure can be secured going forward.

Community Hubs – The community hubs have provided a localised solution enabling a greater focus on residents needs at a local level. Community Associations are facing difficult financial challenges however a review of their position and planning for their reset is being supported by the Council.

Central food supply – The one area the community hubs found difficult was the provision of food parcels. The volumes required swamped the hubs. The model

was switched to provide basic food parcels centrally but finished and distributed by community hubs. The Sneyd operation will be mothballed but easily reopened when required. Supermarkets have increased their capacity for home deliveries so this element of infrastructure may not be called upon.

Volunteers – The work of our volunteers have been critical to supporting the work at Sneyd and in the community hubs. The Council will keep in contact with our volunteers to understand their availability if needed due to a local or national lockdown.

Council Corporate Plan priorities

- 4.23 This proposal supports the Council's urgent and emergency response to the Covid 19 pandemic and the role the Council plays in providing Civic Leadership and mobilising the public to support our community response to Covid-19.
- 4.24 This proposal links to the Council's corporate priority 'Communities are prospering and resilient'. It supports the most vulnerable to be protected from avoidable harm, by enabling them to stay safely at home, and takes pressure off the NHS and social care colleagues. It will also enhance the quality of life for many people who are suffering ill-health and are socially isolated.
- 4.25 The proposal also links to emergency planning and resilience. By taking action to mobilise the voluntary and community sector to be part of the Covid-19 response, we are seeking the best set of outcomes for local residents, achieving cost effectiveness and delivering sustainable outcomes.

Risk management

- 4.26 There are an increased number of options currently for local people requiring support to remain safely self-isolating where they do not have family or friends to help them. The supply chain for food has eased and food banks report no major concerns in terms of food supply. There are two ongoing concerns. The first is the reluctance of some shielded people to leave their homes which is mitigated by the continued support from community hubs through the befriending service. The second is a lack of IT skills for some people who are still shielding again mitigated by support from our community hubs who can offer practical help and support and if suitable, appropriate silver surfing support.
- 4.27 The monitoring of the expenditure will continue to be overseen by both the Resilient Communities, and MHJ team, procurement and finance colleagues. The agenda is also discussed daily as part of the COVID-19 chain of command groups (SILVER and GOLD), which has representatives of all internal Stakeholders responsible for delivering safe outcomes as a result of COVID-19.
- 4.28 The network of community associations and community groups that have supported the community response to the COVID-19 pandemic have not been open for activities other than emergency response. Their funding has been supported through the furlough scheme and grants however many will struggle until there is a return to business as usual. Business as usual could well be a considerable way off and therefore the CA's may require continued support and monitoring.

Financial implications

- 4.29 The report recommends a sum of £64,939 is made available for a three month initiative to support shielded residents who don't meet the criteria for support from Adult Social Care. If approved this will be funded via the COVID-19 grant from government.
- 4.30 The government has agreed in principle that costs associated with the Covid-19 crisis will be covered centrally, but there is currently no certainty that the Council will be able to recover the full cost of this type of initiative. Lottery funding is not available to support what is seen as a council service although befriending is something which may attract the possibility of lottery funding.
- 4.31 Council officers will continue to encourage local charitable organisations to apply for the government announced funding package, and if appropriate, will seek reimbursement of the additional grant funding provided by the Council (up to a maximum of the extra grant aid awarded). The Council and One Walsall are already providing support to local organisations to help them to maximise their chances of gaining additional external funding to support local people.

Procurement Implications/Social Value

- 4.32 The Value of the contracts referred to in this report will in the main fall below the current EU Threshold for Supplies (£189,330). If crisis demand for food continues at the unprecedented rates currently being experienced, or increases further, it is likely that costs would exceed these thresholds however food supplies are purchased through a framework agreement, ESPO Framework Agreement, 83_17 Grocery, Frozen and Fresh Food. The purchase of food is therefore compliant with Public Contract Regulations 2015 and the Council's Contract Rules.

Legal Implications

- 4.33 The Council already has a Crisis Support Scheme, which was approved by Cabinet on 19th March 2015. Provision of crisis support through the Community Hubs is currently being given in accordance with that scheme. The MHJ team have worked with the procurement section team and are purchasing food through the ESPO Framework Agreement, 83_17 Grocery, Frozen and Fresh Food. The purchase of food is therefore done in accordance with the council's financial and contractual rules.

Health and wellbeing implications

- 4.34 Taking a proactive approach to support vulnerable and shielded individuals to safely remain at home during the Covid-19 pandemic will reduce the risk of harm experienced by community members and take the pressure off the NHS.
- 4.35 It is not in the public interest, nor that of the Community and Voluntary Sector Providers, not to support the ongoing public or civic response to Covid-19 that has been mobilised through the Community Hubs.

- 4.36 Whilst medical evidence shows a low rate of infection it is sensible to prepare for localised lockdowns or borough wide lockdowns to ensure our communities are appropriately supported. It is also sensible that there are appropriate links with the Test, Trace and Isolate plan.

Staffing implications

- 4.37 There are no staffing implications arising out of this report.

Reducing Inequalities

- 4.38 An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been completed and can be found as an appendix to this report.

Consultation

- 4.39 Due to the scale and speed of the Covid-19 emergency, the Council and partners have had to stand up the Community Hub infrastructure in a live environment. As a result, it has been very difficult to do formal consultation. That said, there has been many discussions with customers and key partners during the co-design process and the result is a service that is currently receiving and meeting high levels of demand effectively.
- 4.40 Since the step-up of the Making Connections Walsall, Community Hubs and the Sneyd distribution centre there has been ongoing planning and engagement meetings with partners and the VCS. There has been a process of continual improvement which has fine-tuned performance. This approach has covered the design and implementation and is focused on locality need and individual customer support.

5. Decide

- 5.1. Cabinet is requested to consider the content of this report and to agree the recommendations as outlined in section 3.

6 Respond

- 6.1. Subject to Cabinet decision, under emergency powers, an approval for the Council Officers to review and further develop the Community Hub infrastructure as part of an overall plan to ensure the Voluntary and Community Sector remain a key partner in Walsall. The purpose of this work is to:

Prepare for a potential future localised lockdown;
Prepare for a second wave of the COVID-19 virus;
Prepare more effectively for any future pandemic;
Further develop and embed the Resilient Communities philosophy within the borough.

- 6.2. Discussions will continue with the MHCLG, DEFRA and our charities with the aim of ensuring full clarity and agreement about responsibilities and opportunities during the current COVID-19 pandemic.

- 6.3. Community Associations, a key element of our response to COVID-19 and a key group in relation to the Resilient Communities approach, are facing difficult financial times. Apart from Making Connections Walsall and some localised initiatives Community Associations have been closed. There are operational and financial pressures which if not mitigated may challenge the existence of these organisations. The network of CA's are actively seeking grant funding to help support their organisations however there are threats to the future of these organisations.
- 6.4. A "reset" plan is currently being prepared to support Community Associations as they are a key part of both the Resilient Communities approach and our response to COVID-19.

7. **Review**

- 7.1. The arrangements with regards to the Community Hubs and Food Distribution Centre will be managed and reviewed in line with ordinary Council procedures. The monitoring of the expenditure will continue to be overseen by Resilient Communities, MHJ, Procurement and Finance colleagues.
- 7.2. The existing grant arrangements with the voluntary and community groups who receive the additional grant money will be amended (to reflect the change in their duties). The specifications and performance frameworks will also be amended to ensure that Community Hubs respond effectively to the needs of local residents and that data is shared with the Council in a timely way, so that officers can respond to emerging needs.
- 7.3. The agenda is also discussed regularly as part of the COVID-19 chain of command groups (SILVER and GOLD), which has representatives of all internal Stakeholders responsible for delivering safe outcomes as a result of COVID-19. An operational BRONZE group also meets twice a week, which acts as a Civil Leadership operational steering group (bringing together external key partners including representatives from the community and voluntary sector, whg, the police, One Walsall and colleagues from various Council departments).

Background papers

Walsall Council Outbreak Management Plan –

https://go.walsall.gov.uk/covid-19_information/covid-19_-_i_want_to_know/outbreak_management_plan

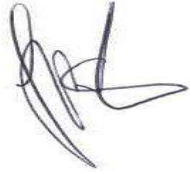
Appendix A – Stories from our community hubs

Appendix B – Covid-19 Impact, Financial Hardship Indicators for Walsall

Appendix C – Equality Impact Assessment

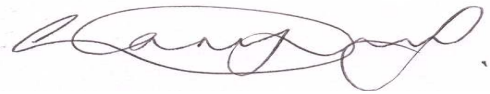
Paul Gordon
Director of Resilient Communities

Elise Hopkins
Director of Customer Engagement



Simon Neilson
Executive Director Economy
Environment and Communities

13 July 2020



Councillor Perry
Communities Leisure and Culture

13 July 2020

The resident made direct contact to the hub; the family were in extreme financial distress. A food parcel was organised and some activity packs/toys for the children. Following conversations, over the next week and after a few calls they agreed to be referred to welfare support so that some professional help could assist the family. Contact was made a few days later to thank us for the support and that welfare had contacted and were supporting them. The outcome is now positive and the family are facing this head on now. The immediate crisis for food for the family was resolved and also a more long-term solution is being explored with welfare.

The resident was thrust into a situation of isolation and lockdown being in the vulnerable category having diabetes and 84 years of age. Initial contact discovered a number of worries:

- A district nurse coming to see the resident regularly, but was unsure they would still come?
- He had regular appts for Chiropody however he was unsure whether and how he would be able to ensure his feet were looked after?
- He has no family and was concerned about his food.

The only thing that he knew was that he would receive his medication, because that was delivered from the pharmacy. Carers were put in place and one of the carers even brought him their microwave, as she was concerned, he was not eating properly. Food parcels were arranged for him and provided befriending calls, he loved a little chat when he called to arrange his food parcel-especially the fresh bread. As he was a diabetic we worked with him, tailoring a food parcel that would meet his needs. He was supported to access a fresh food take away service who now provide hot meals three times a week and he can't praise them enough. He has been helped with a delivery to the post office and to ensure that his bills are being paid by direct debit as he used to do them all manually. This provided great reassurance and took away a worry. The resident has said that his phone has been his lifeline. The combined efforts of everyone across agencies has ensured his medical, physical and wellbeing has been supported through this crisis has enabled the resident to progress through lockdown knowing he not alone.

A resident contacted the hub who is shielded and didn't want to be a nuisance and hated that she needed to ask for help.....but she needed help. Contact has been consistent throughout and she has paid for a food box as she is not in any financial distress. She loved that it's a one stop shop that solved food requirement, provided information on local resources and sorted her prescriptions when needed. She sends us little notes to say thank you, with a special thank you when we added in an Easter Egg that was donated to the charity. She called it a luxury item. The all-round support has been another huge success of the work the hub have carried out.

A resident whose wife was in recovery following a long illness made contact. She was just starting to improve as the pandemic broke. Her husband shielded with her and they took many precautions to keep their selves safe. They managed to get priority shopping delivered however as the weeks progressed,

they felt their mental wellbeing was being affected. They contacted Manor Farm hub for support, and chatted about their interests and hobbies. They had enjoyed their garden but never had time to really dedicate to it. The feedback on their 'grow your own' pack has been great. It gave focus and something to concentrate on. They have set up a small area for growing their own vegetables. This has also encouraged them to spend time out of the house, albeit in their own garden. The hub provided everything they would need to start their patch so no need to go out to buy and extra canes were dropped off as their plants progressed. To date 76 Grow your own packs have been delivered to residents in the East, including families, unemployed and shielded residents.

A resident who was referred to us was very concerned about the 12 week isolation and was panicking about how she would get her shopping done or food delivered. She was signposted to Walsall Black Sisters who delivered a food parcel initially, but have also kept in touch and fetched any shopping that was required. The client said that they were an absolute god send.

A resident was referred in who had run out of his medication and it needed to be collected that day. The St Matthews Church OWLS service made a special journey after completing a number of shopping drop off to collect the prescription and deliver it to the client.

We have supported a local resident with shopping, who suffers medical conditions meaning she wanted to self-isolate and felt she was 'putting on' her daughter who had young children and was fetching her shopping. She had seen the COVID-19 contact number and rang for support. She said that she felt she had regained some independence by using our shopping service as she was not asking her daughter and loved that she could pay over the phone, she even referred her sister who lived opposite her. Both ladies have used the shopping service several times, and have said the service made them feel in control again.

Our kitchen staff who usually prepare all meals for our day care clients have been making homemade meals that we have frozen and added to our shopping service. We had people requesting ready meals on their shopping, and decided to make our own, using local suppliers for meat and vegetables, staff have created a variety of nutritious ready meals, including sausage and mash, fish pie, chicken dinners and beef stew. We have had really positive feedback from people, who have said it's lovely to eat home cooked food instead of your usual supermarket ready meal and some resident's even ring up to see what is on the menu each week!

We recently had a resident call to request a free food parcel for his elderly father. He explained that he couldn't help him out financially as he had lost his agency employment due to the Coronavirus crisis. After further discussion we were really pleased to be able to help not only the father but also the man who rang due to his change in financial circumstances, he didn't realise he would be eligible and was very happy to receive a food parcel.

We have made good links with a local pharmacist who serves many of our NorthWalsall residents. On occasions where urgent prescriptions have come through and they have not had any delivery drivers available, they have given our number out directly. Several people who have called in these instances have called the service 'a life saver' and one lady in particular has said that she's found real peace of mind to know that we have been able to ensure her poorly husband gets his medication when there has been no delivery services available at the pharmacy.

A young resident suffering with long term mental health conditions that we have been supporting through our befriending service sadly informed our befriending staff that she had been in hospital after taking an overdose. The resident's prescription was ready to be collected and delivered by one of our WHG drivers.. When we received the update from the befriending staff, we consulted with the pharmacy, who understood the concerns, were grateful to have been made aware and made the decision to deliver one tablet themselves to the lady every day, in order to ensure she was taking her medication safely. She is still being supported through our befriending service and has been taking her medication regularly and is starting to feel a little better.

Covid-19

Impact on benefits, finances, housing and jobs



Walsall Council

PROUD OF OUR PAST OUR PRESENT AND FOR OUR FUTURE

Summary: 1

The new schemes introduced by Government do provide some support.

There are many customers financially disadvantaged that required additional support.

Since the 16 March 2020 both the DWP and Councils have seen dramatic increases in demand.

- **Universal Credit (UC):** Nationally 950,000 new Universal Credit claims were submitted in the last two weeks of March 20 (800% to 900% higher than normal rate). Walsall received around 3,000 claims per week in early April 20. The total number of all Universal Credit claims in the West Midlands Group rose by 21% in May 20.
- **Housing Benefit (HB) and/or Council Tax Reduction (CTR) applications:** On average 107 new applications received per week in January and February 2020. This increased to 285 by April 2020.
- **Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs):** Walsall applications increased by 10% (March 2019 to March 2020). Spend in March 20 is 12% higher than March 19. We expect further increases in applications and spend as we have identified 9,779 households who potentially have been affected and will need additional support in addition to new claims from people not claiming prior to COVID 19. We expect a further spike when eviction action recommences and if further redundancies are announced.

Summary: 2

Increase in homeless presentations / applications: combination of economic and social issues are expected to dramatically increase demand for help especially post lockdown

Housing Evictions – 3 month eviction ban commenced mid March. This was later extended to 23rd August 20 which means that there is likely to be significant demand for help from that date onwards:

- More council tax reduction applications and spend and or
- Housing support (emergency accommodation and homelessness applications)
- Potential increase in DHP spend and demand

Rogue landlords will continue to be rogue! Covid-19 won't improve their behaviour and there are likely to be many vulnerable tenants impacted by their actions over the coming weeks.

Domestic Abuse:

- More women and girls will be abused and are at risk in this period. Every pandemic and major disaster has found this.
- Nationally deaths have doubled.
- Expected to be a surge in demand for help when lockdown lifts.

Summary: 3

Impacts of COVID-19 on vulnerable children

- **In temporary accommodation in UK – Lancet article.** We are seeking to provide additional support to families with young children especially the most at risk (the under 5-year olds). National data suggests that 34% of children live in poverty in the UK (Social Metrics Commission, 2019). It is estimated that 41% of children in Walsall live in poverty once housing costs are taken into account, equating to around 30,551 children (End Child Poverty, 2019)

Impact of Covid-19 is NOT equal: Impact on residents and communities from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds is higher. Walsall has a higher than average BAME demographic.

One of the main risks for vulnerable customers was access to food:

Inequality of access to food and healthy food for vulnerable families: for example;

- Ø how do you get online shopping when you have no ICT, no WIFI and or no credit or debit card!
- Ø The pressures we all face getting our shopping are exacerbated for vulnerable families
- Ø Making Connections Walsall provided essential support in these areas

Impact on foodbanks: many of our vulnerable customers rely on foodbanks, and there was a major concern that access to food through this route would be severely impacted by less contributions received, and the ability to retain enough volunteers

Government measures to support customers in the coronavirus crisis - 1

Customers on benefits

- £20 per week increase to Working Tax Credit basic amount
- £20 increase to Universal Credit standard allowance
- Local Housing Allowance rates increased to the lowest 30th percentile of market rents
- Housing Benefit additional earnings disregard increased by £20 per week
- Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) now payable from day one instead of day seven
- Department for Works and Pensions (DWP) stopped all overpayment recovery action on a temporary basis
- There has been a number of changes to definitions within various benefits/tax credits to ensure customers effected by coronavirus can either claim or continue to receive benefits if they are now unable to work

Universal Credit customers continuing with their employment as normal during the Coronavirus outbreak will not be financially disadvantaged. Sanctions and conditionality were temporarily suspended for three months for all Universal Credit customers. The impact on these customers was:

- Were they maintaining payment of bills during the crisis?
- Impact on their mental health during lockdown?

We anticipate an increased demand for DHPs once evictions recommence from 23rd August 2020

Measures - 2

Employed

- Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) - Extended until 31/10/20
- Statutory Sick Pay payable from day one not day four
- £1,000 grant to employers for each member of staff kept in employment after furlough until end of Jan 2021

Self-employed

- Self-employed Income Support Scheme (SEISS)
- Minimum Income Floor suspended in Universal Credit
- Business Grants for small businesses

Other initiatives

- £500 million Council Tax Hardship fund
- Free school meal voucher scheme
- Social/Private landlords will not be able to start proceedings to evict tenants for at least a 6 month period – and 3 month mortgage payment holiday
- £750 million support package to charities
- £3.2m emergency fund for rough sleeping – Walsall allocated £4.5k
- £1.6bn for local authorities – mainly for social care but also for homelessness and rough sleeping – Walsall allocated £9.6m
- £3m for food redistribution organisations

Customers still dramatically impacted

- Low paid workers are the most vulnerable
- Workers on zero hour contracts, temporary workers and self-employed are most likely to be affected economically by coronavirus
- Customers with no recourse to public funds – there were calls to allow those who are now unable to work because of Covid19 to have immediate access to welfare support but this was not accepted
- Charities called for the Government to temporarily remove legal barriers to homelessness provision and make clear that everyone who is homeless is eligible for assistance - regardless of priority need, intentionality, local connection, or immigration status. This was successful and temporary provision made available
- Resolution Foundation say that despite measures put in place a huge number of people are still going to lose their jobs and need immediate income support to avoid hardship

Impact - 1

8 April **Government stated:**

- Coronavirus has had profound effects on the UK economy and on household finances
- Up to one fifth of employees may be absent from work during the outbreak
- Existing data suggests inactivity and unemployment will rise quickly – there are already signs of a spike in unemployment
- This will translate into a rapid upsurge in benefit claims and an increased reliance on the social security system

➤ 1 April **Departments for Works and Pensions (DWP) disclosed there had been:**

- 1.8 million declarations for new claims received in the 6 weeks up to 12.4.20 for Universal Credit claims – this is 5 times higher than the average
- Many customers have spent hours trying to phone welfare staff, many gave up after long phone queues and then being rejected by the system. One user reported spending more than 15 hours in total over three days waiting to speak to a benefits official. A report on 9 April confirms:
 - 30 March 2.2M telephone calls made to DWP
 - 31 March 1.8M telephone calls made to DWP
 - A user posted a screenshot showing there were 105,563 people ahead of them in an online queue to verify their identity

Impact - 2

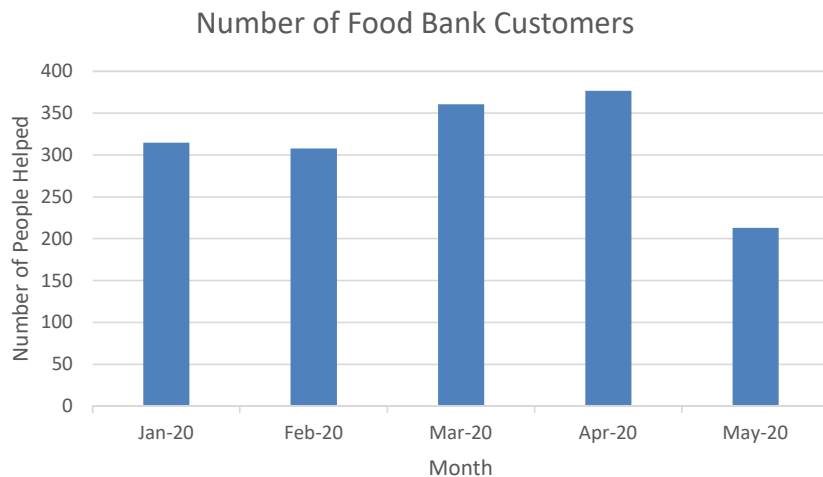
- Resolution Foundation predicts that the eventual rise in unemployment will be at least as large as and much swifter than that seen during the financial crisis
- Another report highlighted that a quarter of those eligible for the Self Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS) would need financial help before their grant arrives in/or after June 2020
- Nationally 7 out of 10 firms had furloughed employees by 22nd April 2020
- 33,600 employees in Walsall had been furloughed by 31st May 2020. Across the West Midlands this total was 330,400
- The DWP have reported a significant reduction in the number of job vacancies across the West Midlands

Impact - 3

- The Confederation of British Industry (CBI) said on 15 April 20 it was worried companies would be forced to start redundancy procedures within a week to comply with the minimum 45-day consultation period
- Food banks are coming under severe strain
- Charities are also under severe strain
- 27% of businesses reported reduced staffing levels
- New weekly job vacancies fell by about a third

Impact on Food Banks

- Food Banks operate independently to the four Hubs in Walsall and referrals are received from a number of locations such as the Beacon Centre, Housing First, Crisis Support, and Social Workers
- The Trussell Trust reported an 89% increase in Food Bank usage from April 19 to April 20. Ablewell reports a 140% increase
- The Black Country Food Bank saw a 30% increase in Food Bank usage based on the two weeks prior to lockdown in April 20
- They have had to limit vouchers to one per week (this provides 3 days worth of food) and limit to a maximum family size of 4
- There has been an increase in usage by single people that could be attributed to families receiving Free School Meals vouchers or support via the Hubs instead



- The chart on the left shows the number of people who have received food via Ablewell Food Bank in Walsall so far this year
- We anticipated early there may be a reduction in demand in May 20 as those who claimed Universal Credit start to receive their payments and those with families are receiving FSMs vouchers regularly
- Restrictions at supermarkets have hampered attempts to keep Ablewell stocked and they are still low on fruit juice and various tinned goods
- Ablewell have advised if people can get to a Food Bank they should to relieve pressure on the Hubs to help those who are vulnerable and housebound

Economic Impact Nationally

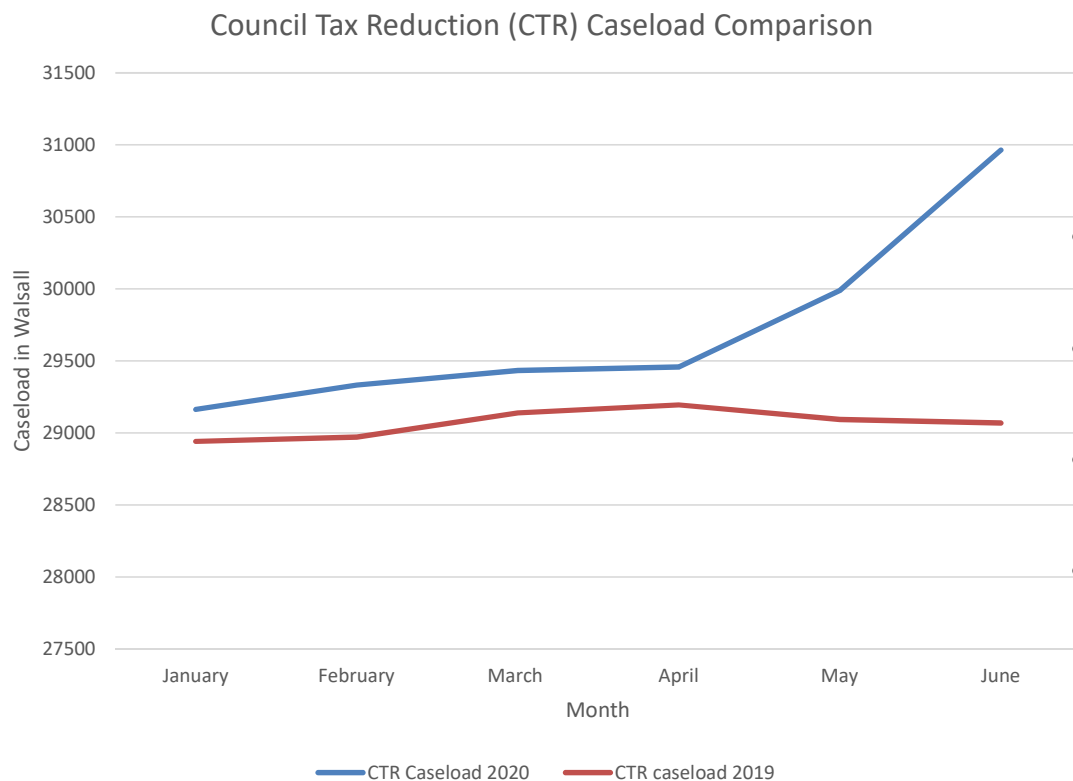
There are currently limited figures available.
Those that are, are from several months ago.

A House of Commons briefing (1 April 20) quoted data collected on 25 March 20:

- 57% of workers were engaged in less paid work over the past week than usual
- 8% of workers had already lost their job due to coronavirus
- Expected probability of job loss within next 4 months is 33%
- Workers expect to earn 35% less in the next 4 months on average
- There is a 49% chance of them having problems paying their bills
- The young and low-income earners have been hit the hardest

It is predicted things will continue to get worse while restrictions are in place although we have recently seen easing of restrictions allowing some people to return to the workplace. We anticipate an increase in redundancies over the next few months

Impact on Council Tax Reduction caseload

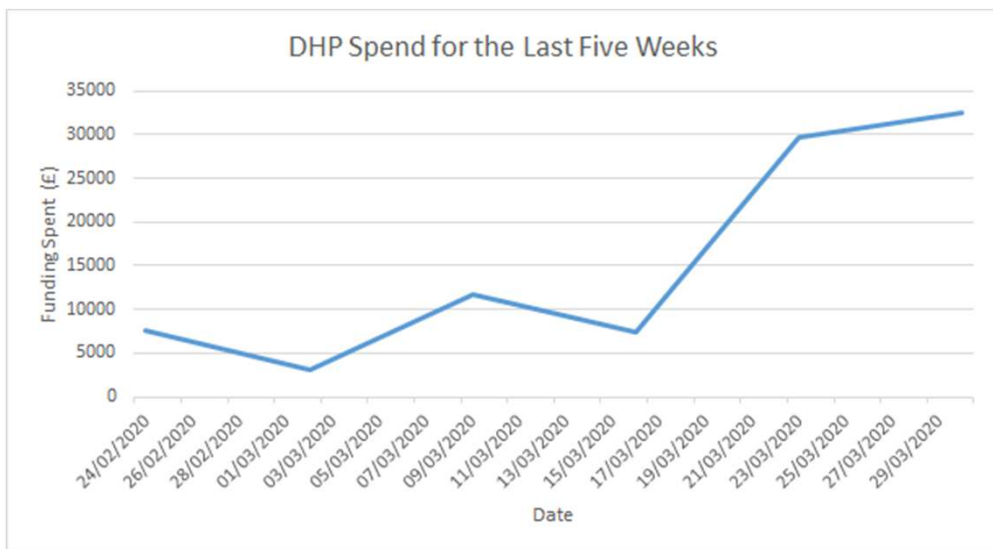


- Our Council Tax Reduction (CTR) costs have increased by £360,000 since 1 March 20 due to the requests for additional support and change in circumstances associated with the Coronavirus outbreak
- The CTR caseload has risen by 6.1% since January 20
- The high number of applications received in April is evidenced with the increase in caseload by June 20
- We continue to monitor the number of CTR applications made on a weekly basis
- The total cost of the CTR scheme for 2020/21 is £13.3 million

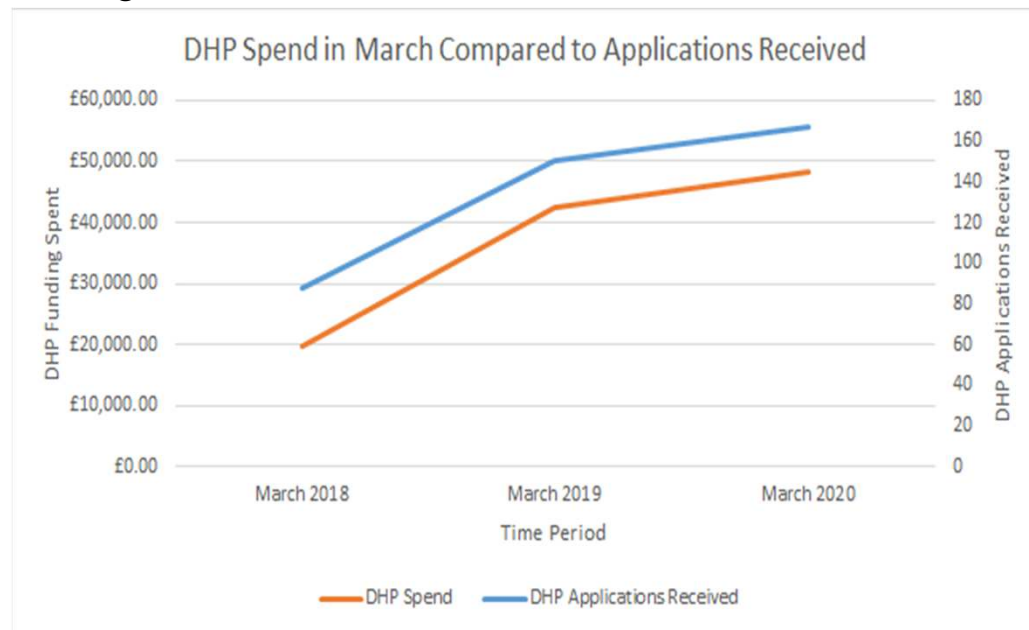
Slide 13

DL2 1% and 0.88% are almost the same - what are the caseload numbers? i ehow many addiotnal cases
David Lockwood, 15/04/2020

Impact on Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)



- DHP spending has increased significantly since 19 March 20
- Funding for the financial year 2020/21 has increased to £988,560 which is a 18% increase on previous year's funding



Data shows for March year on year increase in:

- the amount of DHP funding spent and
- number of applications received

We continue to monitor weekly spend and number of applications received to help understand the ongoing impact of the pandemic.

Slide 14

BC1 Not sure if It would be pertinent to know how many are a result of UC
Bernard Cysewski, 16/04/2020

Effects on Housing Evictions in Walsall: 1

The new rules implemented by central government regarding evictions do two things:

1. Extend the notice period for evictions
2. Suspend eviction court action until at least 23 August 2020

All court proceedings for eviction are on hold regardless of when the landlord applied to court. This means most tenants can't be evicted before the end of August at the earliest

There are implications that Walsall Council may face if customers do not:

- clear the arrears themselves
- or notify us they need help

We expect closer to 23 August:

- an increase in DHP requests and or
- an increase customer demand for Housing Support from those facing eviction

Effects on Housing Evictions in Walsall: 2

Quote from a registered social landlord (RPs) in Walsall

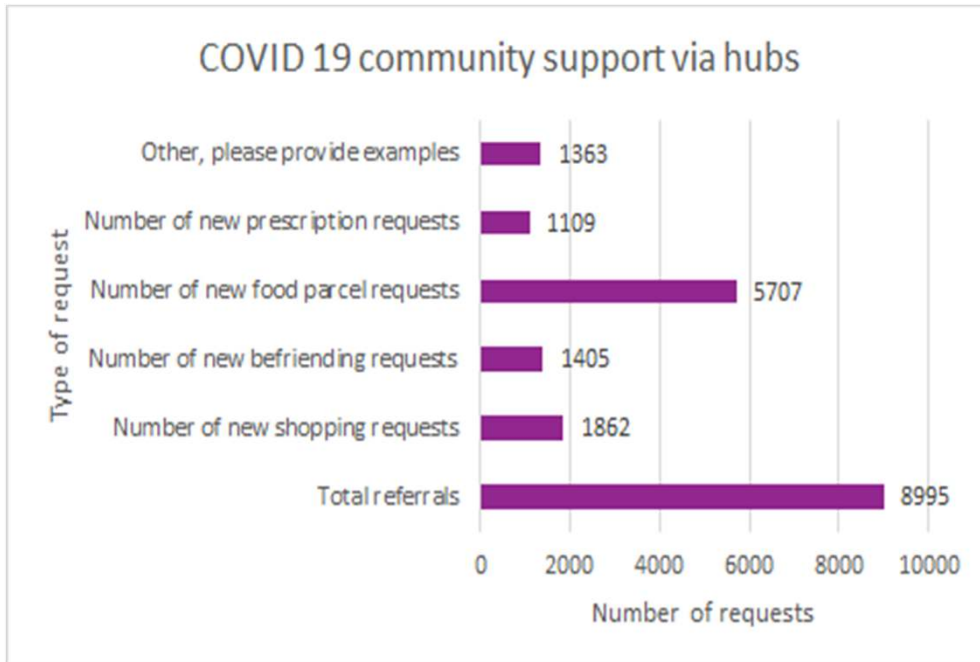
'Early analysis shows that we have seen a sharp rise in cases where Tenants are self-employed or never claimed out of work benefits and now are unable to pay rent'

As of 16th April, a number of RPs have confirmed that they have seen arrears rising, they are now conducting analysis in readiness for August. Support offered has been limited due to Covid-19 restrictions

We will also need to model the potential impact on PRS legal (and illegal) evictions and homeowner repossessions as both will be expected to increase.

Rogue landlords are unlikely to get better – they will continue to ignore tenants needs, break the law and undertake unlawful evictions. Many will use the lockdown as an excuse to do even less to help their tenants.

Community impact and support



Since the commencement of lockdown on 23.3.20 the 4 community hubs have been providing support for households affected by COVID 19 outbreak

- 8995 requests for help and support
- 5707 requests for support with food parcels, this is in addition to NHS food parcels
- 1862 requests for help with shopping
- 1405 requests for befriending due to isolation
- 1109 requests for help with prescriptions
- 1363 other requests which include financial advice
- The number of requests per week during the peak were consistently around 800 – 900, reductions have been seen since the easing of lockdown restrictions and demand is now around 200 – 300 per week

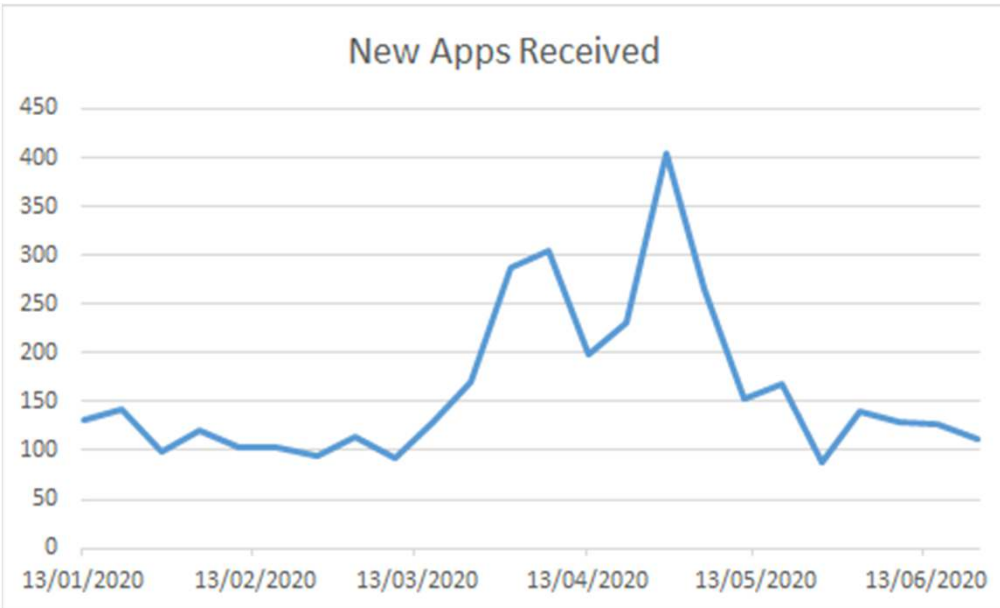
Data has been obtained via hubs and DCRS referral system and contains data up to and including 8.7.20

Free School meals impact

Impact since schools closed on 23.03.2020:

- 647 new eligible children have been added to the FSM scheme
- 660 new potential eligible cases are being assessed
- Problems with the national voucher scheme leading to schools asking for direct help
- 6928 additional vouchers have been issued through our own scheme providing £103,920 of support to households in Walsall

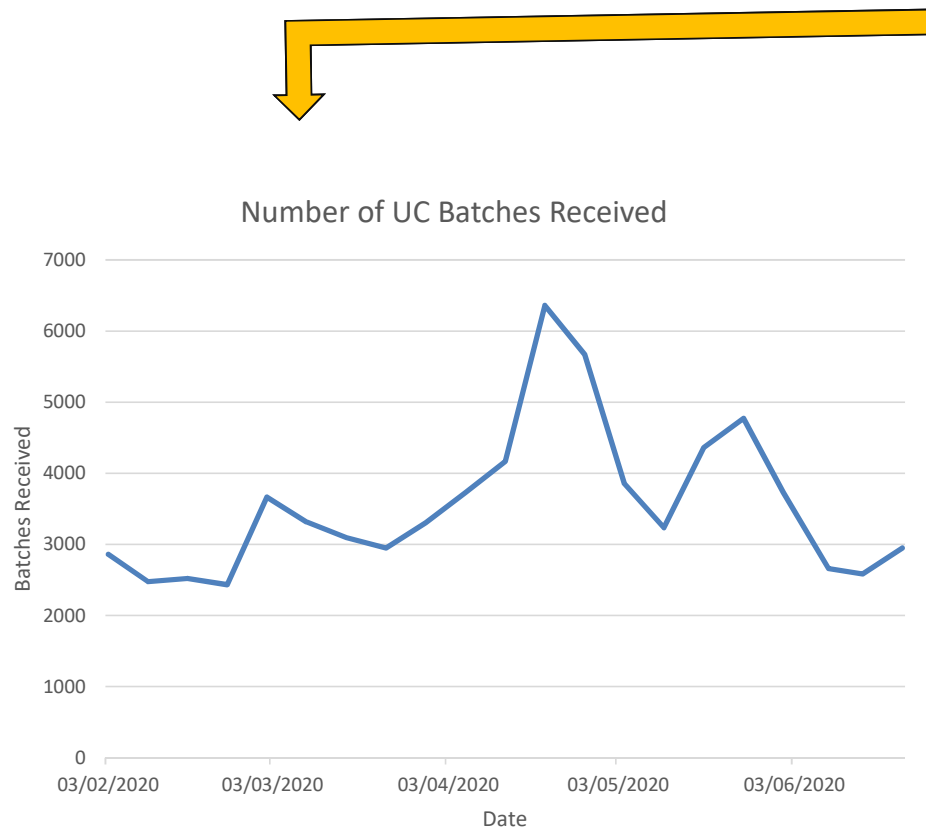
Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction New Applications Received



Key Facts:

- For Jan and Feb 2020 the average number of new claims received was 397
- This increased to **1,005 in March 20 (a 60% increase)**
- The number of claims continued to increase between 1 March 20 and 10 May 20
- Within these new applications are customers who have never claimed benefits before and their lifestyle and monthly expenditure will be higher – resulting in a dramatic reduction in income, this cohort required additional temporary support
- We have seen a downward trend in our figures from 11th May 20 but continue to monitor this closely on a weekly basis. We anticipate there may be another spike if more redundancies are announced in the future

Universal Credit (UC) notifications received



- UC notifications received **increased the week following the announcement of lockdown**, this shows customers were starting to report changes or make new applications following being financially affected
- By mid April we were, on average, receiving **3,000+ notifications per week which increased to over 6000 by the end of the month**
- Our UC workload over doubled by the end of April 20 in comparison to earlier in the year
- In May we received on average 4,000 notifications which reduced further in June to on average 3,000 notifications which is still higher than pre lockdown. This is expected to spike again once redundancies kick in after the furlough scheme ends.

Slide 20

DL1 do we have data for same period last year?

David Lockwood, 15/04/2020

Understanding our current CTR caseload

Our proactive action:

We have analysed earnings and self-employment claims to predict the percentage of our caseload that may be affected financially by the Coronavirus outbreak:

In April 20 we had an overall CTR caseload of 29,474

As pensioners should not be financially affected, we have deducted this element from our potential caseload –

This left us with a **working age CTR caseload of 18,486**

Understanding our current CTR caseload – Analysis of Income Types

We analysed income types and this indicates how the following would be financially impacted:

- **3,277 Universal Credit households with earnings**
Potential change to income each month if not on maximum amount of Universal Credit
- **5784 Claims with earnings**
Potential furloughed cases (only receiving 80% of pay) or new Universal Credit claims
- **718 Self-employed claims**
A high proportion of our self-employed caseload will not qualify for SEISS due to not completing tax returns. This will mean making a claim for Universal Credit.
Note: Self-employed customers who do qualify for SEISS had to wait until June 2020 to receive income from this scheme, Many needed help until this point.

9,779 households potentially financially affected by lockdown restrictions

This results in 53% of our Working age CTR caseload

In addition to this there was also an increase in new applications being received. .

Council Tax Hardship

As part of the package of measures introduced to assist the economically vulnerable (caused by COVID-19) the government announced a hardship fund to assist with the payment of the 2020/21 Council Tax.

Walsall was allocated £3,879,239 from this fund, Although it is for each authority to make its own determination in respect of any hardship relief scheme the guidelines state that the government expects that local authorities reduces the council tax liability of each working age council tax reduction claimant by £150.

In addition to the award of the hardship relief the COVID-19 crisis has seen a marked increase in the number of households applying for council tax reduction. With the cost of Council Tax Reduction being borne locally, there will also be a call on hardship grant to fund this extra cost.

The situation at the end of June is as follows

- £3,127,074 awarded in hardship relief
- £1,414,715 increase in the amount of working age council tax reduction awarded
- £4,541,789 total of hardship relief and extra council tax reduction against an allocation of £3,879,239

Council Tax Payments

To assist the financially affected households, the Council offered three options to assist residents in paying their council tax liability. These options were:

Option 1

If you currently pay your council tax in instalments due April to January, you can spread the year's charge over 12 months; April 2020 to March 2021.

Option 2

If you currently pay your council tax in instalments due April to January, you can have instalments due June 2020 to March 2021.

Option 3

You can have April and May instalments spread over your remaining payments from June 2020 onwards.

Around 2,000 households took advantage of this offer.

At the end of June 25.4% of the 2020/21 council tax had been collected totalling £35.9m. This is 1.1% (£1.5m) down from where we would normally hope to be.

It is estimated that at the end of the year Walsall will be 2% (£2.8m) down in council tax collections

Business Grants

As part of the overall packages to assist businesses a series of grant schemes were introduced. The schemes available are:

- Ratepayers in receipt of small business rate relief (subject to some minor exceptions)
- Ratepayers of certain retail, hospitality and leisure properties
- Discretionary Scheme (rules to be determined by local authority with certain expectations set by government)

The first two grant schemes have been running since April while the discretionary scheme was a later addition and only became available in June. For this fund Walsall have been given an allocation of £2.3m.

The level of grants paid under these schemes are as follows

Grant Scheme	Number Paid	Amount of Grants
Small Business Grants	3,184	£31,840,000
Retail, Hospitality & leisure Grants	577	£10,630,000
Discretionary Grants	163	£1,111,572

Domestic Abuse – Deaths Double Nationally

“Coronavirus may exacerbate triggers, though I might prefer to call them excuses. Lockdown may restrict some women’s access to support or escape and it may even curtail measures some men take to keep their own violence under control” Karen Ingala Smith, the founder of Counting Dead Women,

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/apr/15/domestic-abuse-killings-more-than-double-amid-covid-19-lockdown>

Walsall stats to date show the expected increase in Domestic abuse homeless applications:

Walsall has seen an increase of 44% from April – 9th July 2020 compared to the same period in 2019, current analysis is being carried out to understand the outcome and what led to the application. The service hasn't seen a cause for concern in the case increase and believe it's mainly due to the impact of the lockdown and should reduce as easing of restrictions are introduced

Homelessness – Increases expected to be slightly masked

We are finding this demand is remaining static at present, this is mainly due to the government suspension on evictions during the COVID 19 pandemic, although we expect to see a peak from the end of August, please see below other factors that will mean an increase will be experienced in the future:

- Ability for landlords (private and social) to issue Section 21 evictions has been suspended until August 2020 – this has halted demand for re-housing from this source
- The block on Section 21 is also unfortunately likely to lead to an increase in rent arrears as households either choose or struggle to make regular rent payments
- Some people are tending to 'stay put' through these very 'new times'
- Government mortgage holiday whilst helping some initially to avoid loss of home it is expected that when this ends there will be an increase due to those who have struggled to maintain payments / agree payment terms
- Increase in domestic violence cases during lockdown is likely to lead to a surge in applications when lockdown is lifted

Impact of Covid-19 on Vulnerable children in temporary accommodation

Lancet article 31 March 2020. Significant extra risks to children 5 years of age and younger. "Many children already do not reach development potential or struggle to grow and develop because of multilevel barriers, including those resulting from poverty or homelessness. However, COVID-19 has added a whole new layer of risk. "

Article identified range of areas of concern. Many are not as relevant for Walsall as we continue to provide temporary accommodation for families principally in self-contained properties some concerns remain including:

- Critical need to ensure sufficient additional resources for soap and disinfectants for families;
- No face-to-face contact with general practitioners and health outreach services is available, including health visitors, limits routine checks such as early identification of need and risk, health and development reviews with screening assessments, immunisations, promotion of social and emotional development, support for parenting, promotion of health and behavioural change, prevention of obesity, and promotion of breastfeeding
- For these families, access to basic essentials (eg, food, nappies) is scarce, with no resources to shop online and many charities and dropins now closed.
- Risks to parental mental health are increased, especially among single mothers, given that housing instability is associated with an increased risk of depression in mothers.

Inequality of access to food and healthy food for vulnerable families

Online shopping: Most vulnerable families have no / limited access to online food and essentials shopping facilities which require:

- ICT
- Internet / WIFI
- Credit or debit cards or similar via online banking
- ICT skills to navigate systems

As many vulnerable households would not have previously made use of on-line shopping even if they had all the above their ability to quickly access / benefit was limited due to the significant growth in demand from other households and the competing demands upon their time. Making Connections Walsall supported a significant number of households during the lockdown and continues to do so.

Access to shops: Vulnerable households especially single parents will have been more severely impacted by the changes in retailing. The pressures that all of us have faced to access food shopping will have been exacerbated for those who must also consider / have to take their children with them to queue to access shops for food.

Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) residents and communities

There's a disproportionate percentage of BAME people getting ill.

“We have heard the virus does not discriminate between individuals but there's no doubt there appears to be a manifest disproportionate severity of infection in BAME people and doctors. This has to be addressed – the government must act now.”

Statement by Chair of British Medical Association

Not only are BAME communities disproportionately impacted by health inequalities, the economic impact is likely to hit them harder too, with [rates of poverty in BAME communities being twice that of their white counterparts](#).

BAME residents in Walsall comprise 23% (2011 census) compared to 14% of the population of England and Wales.

Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) for Policies, Procedures and Services

Proposal name	Providing Civil Leadership and Mobilising the Public – Covid 19		
Directorate	Resources and Transformation		
Service	Money Home Job and Resilient Communities		
Responsible Officer	Elise Hopkins/Paul Gordon		
Proposal planning start	March 2020	Proposal start date (due or actual date)	March 2020

1	What is the purpose of the proposal?	Yes / No	New / revision
	Show which category the proposal is and whether it is new or a revision.		
	Policy	Yes	New
	Procedure		
	Guidance		
	Is this a service to customers/staff/public?	Yes	New
	If yes, is it contracted or commissioned?	Yes	New
	Other - give details		
2	What is the business case for this proposal? Please provide the main purpose of the service, intended outcomes and reasons for change?		
	<p>COVID-19 is a new illness that can affect your lungs and airways. It's caused by a virus called coronavirus and has affected the UK considerably since early 2020. National government policy has steered towards a range of measures including social distancing and recommending for those showing symptoms to isolate up to 14 days and those who are vulnerable/elderly to self-isolate in their homes for up to 12 weeks. As a result of these measures a number of vulnerable and elderly residents in the borough will need help with accessing basic food and medical supplies.</p> <p>The Council is working with a wide range of partner organisations, in an attempt to help minimise the spread of COVID-19. To achieve this, the Council has applied a resilient communities approach, providing civic leadership, to mobilise a public response through our vibrant voluntary and community sector, in recognised locality 'hub' areas. The approach supports shielded or vulnerable residents in self-isolation to stay safely at home and provides essential food to individuals and families in financial hardship, without building long-term dependency on the Council. It also aims to build long lasting connections between local residents, enhancing cohesion and reducing social isolation for vulnerable people.</p>		



3	Who is the proposal likely to affect?		
	People in Walsall	Yes / No	Detail
	All	Yes	Covid-19 can affect all residents, key front line workers and more so who come into contact with infected people such as those in the care sector. Research suggests those that are elderly or with underlying health issues are often more susceptible to the virus and can have more long-term issues and medical complications. Source: https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/ , accessed 28/4/20)
	Specific group/s		
	Council employees		
Other (identify)			
4	Please provide service data relating to this proposal on your customer's protected characteristics.		
<p>Context: Walsall is a metropolitan borough consisting of a mix of urban, suburban and semi-rural communities. The borough covers 40 square miles, is located to the north-west of Birmingham, and is one of the four local authorities that make up the Black Country sub-region (with Dudley, Sandwell and Wolverhampton). Walsall town centre lies at the heart of the borough surrounded by Aldridge, Bloxwich, Brownhills, Darlaston and Willenhall district centres.</p> <p>Population: Walsall has an overall estimated population of 281,300 (ONS, mid-2017). It is predicted to increase by 5.9% over 10 years, from 274,200 in 2014 to 290,200 in 2024. Like many areas, the predicted growth of Walsall's older population (> 65) is higher than this at 12.4%.</p> <p>Ethnicity: Walsall is a culturally diverse town with a 24% non-white British background, where people of Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi background form the largest minority ethnic groups. The number of non-UK born residents in Walsall increased by 3.7% (or 9,900 people) between the 2001 and 2011 censuses and Walsall now has a small Eastern European population who make up about 1% of residents (2,700 people in total). In terms of children and young people aged 0-17, the proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups has increased to 37.4% of all pupils living in the area from 36.7% in 2016 and 24% Primary pupils have English as an additional language. (School Census, January 2017).</p> <p>Households: As at April 2019 there are approximately 116,261 households in Walsall which is an increase of 8% or 8439 households since 2011. (Source: Walsall Council). However, between April 2018 and April 2019 there was a small increase in the number of households from 115,501 to 116,215.</p> <p>Housing and Tenure: Census 2011 shows 63% of properties in Walsall are owner-occupier, 24% social rent and 11.7% are private rented. The Walsall Private Sector Stock Condition Survey 2019 has since shown there has been a significant increase in the size of the private rented sector since Census 2011 from 11.7% to 16%, and subsequent decrease in owner occupation from 63% to 59%, and social housing has remained at around 25%. Average House prices in the borough between December 2018 and December 2019 are £166,532 and the mean annual gross pay for October 2019 is £24,014. This means the ratio of income to house prices is unaffordable for many, with average house prices being around 7 times of annual gross pay.</p> <p>Deprivation: The 2019 Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) now ranks Walsall as the 22nd most deprived English local authority (out of 326). Since 2015, Walsall has seen an increase in deprivation where it previously ranked 33rd. The 2019 IMD shows 20% of</p>			

Walsall's population living in income deprived households. There are two supplementary indices, which are a sub-set of the Income Deprivation Domain.

The Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI 2019) is one of the sub sets measures the proportion of all children aged 0 to 15 living in income-deprived families and shows 26.1% of children in Walsall are living in income-deprived families.

There are extremes of deprivation, with central and western areas typically much more deprived than eastern areas although pockets of deprivation exist even in the more affluent parts of the borough.

Health and life expectancy: 2011 Census results show that overall health is poorer in Walsall than in England and Wales. One in five residents have a limiting health condition: 10.4% are limited a lot, and a further 10.3% limited a little. 77.3% of residents say their health is good or very good – lower than the 81.2% nationally – with 7.3% experiencing bad or very bad health (5.6% nationally).

Overall life expectancy is gradually increasing for both males and females and the gap with comparator areas has shown positive signs of narrowing. However, the focus continues to be on prolonging a healthy life expectancy and understanding and planning for the implications that will have on service need and provision. Walsall has a lower healthy life expectancy age compared to regional and national comparators. Female healthy life expectancy is lower than males.

Age: The Joint strategic Needs Assessment showed in 2018 that the age of the population is geographically divided: the urban, more deprived areas of the borough are generally younger. The more affluent, least deprived & more rural areas towards the east & south-east are older. This is important to understand the relative demand for services by area.

Walsall has proportionately more young people (under 15) & older people (over 75) population than the England average. In contrast, the working age population is lower than England in most age groups. The net result is a high dependency ratio of 0.64 (dependents : working age), which increases demand for the provision of services. Walsall's population is aging & will see a significant increase in those aged 65 & over - particularly in the 90+ age band. This will be important in determining the future demand on services.

Characteristics of the four hub areas:

Our locality areas have a number of differences in demographics (sourced at Census 2011) and challenges and we have taken these factors into consideration and provided locality based community service which is able to meet the needs of our diverse communities. (Locality Profiles Walsall Council 2020

<https://www.walsallintelligence.org.uk/home/profiles/locality-profiles/>)

The North locality population is 56,500 and has:

- A younger age profile than borough overall
- High proportion of younger children under 10
- Fewer working age and older people
- 14.2% minority ethnic residents which is lower than the borough (Walsall average 24.1%)
- Asian: Pakistani is the largest minority group – 4.1% (Walsall average 5.3%)
- A mix of all other minority groups living in the locality in smaller numbers
- Very high proportion of socially rented properties (37.8%) and below average owner occupation
- Above average proportion of lone parent families and people living alone
- Cancer prevalence within the wards of the North locality is lower than the borough average.

The South locality area has a population of 64000 and with:

- 55.5% minority ethnic residents is well over double the borough average (24.1%)
- Asian groups comprise the largest minority group at 42.2% (Walsall 15.2%)
- All ethnic groups are above Walsall average except White British
- Above average number of people over 65 living alone
- Significant pockets of relative deprivation in areas such as Alumwell, Birchills and Caldmore
- A significant number of unpaid carers in Paddock.

The East locality has a population of 88900 and with:

- 9.0% minority ethnic residents is less than half the borough average (24.1%)
- Asian Indian is the largest minority group at 2.8% (Walsall 6.1%)
- All ethnic groups below Walsall average except White British
- Above average number of people over 65 living alone
- Significantly less deprived than the borough overall
- East locality has high proportions of residents providing unpaid care (12.9% in Pelsall and 11.8% in Brownhills) compared to the borough average (11.4%).

The West locality has a population of 71600 with :

- 19.8% minority ethnic residents is lower than the borough (Walsall average 24.1%)
- Asian: Indian is the largest minority group at 7.4% (Walsall average 5.3%)
- A mix of all other minority groups but in smaller numbers
- Above average proportion of lone parent families (13.9%) than Walsall average (12.0%)
- Slightly more deprived than the borough overall
- Pockets of neighbourhoods to the north less deprived (Coppice Farm North & Coppice Farm South)
- Significant pockets of relative deprivation do exist –New Invention Central; Lodge Farm North; Little London South & King’s Hill.
- The highest proportion of Walsall residents providing unpaid care within the West locality are within the wards of Short Heath, Willenhall North, Bentley & Darlaston North.

5 Please provide details of all engagement and consultation undertaken for this proposal. (Please use a separate box for each engagement/consultation).

Type of engagement/consultation	Internal and external partner dialogue via emails/telephone calls and online meetings	Date	Feb – April 2020
Who attended/participated?	Voluntary and community interest groups, partner agencies, third sector representatives, stakeholders and statutory agencies, internal council services, and elected members.		
Protected characteristics of participants	Representatives from different sector communities were engaged with via emergency and business planning processes.		
Feedback The level of consultation included sharing of key priorities actions and feedback from agencies on the current crisis and resulted in the delivery of a community sector led service.			
6 Concise overview of all evidence, engagement and consultation			
<p>Due to the scale and speed of the Covid-19 emergency, the Council and partners have had to stand up the Community Hub infrastructure in a live environment. As a result, it has been very difficult to do formal consultation. That said, there have been many discussions with customers and key partners during the co-design process and the result is a service that is currently receiving and meeting high levels of demand effectively. However, internal intelligence and data along with communication with the community and voluntary sector we have launched this scheme.</p>			
<p>The Council is working with a range of statutory and voluntary sector partner organisations to help minimise the spread of COVID-19. To achieve this, the Council has applied a resilient communities approach, providing civic leadership to help mobilise a public response via the voluntary, and community sector, in four locality areas.</p>			
<p>The existing ‘Making Connections Walsall initiative’ has been expanded to offer additional support for vulnerable residents and families who need to self-isolate during the Covid-19 emergency. Four Community Hubs are now operating across the following</p>			

areas:

1. **NORTH** - Bloxwich Community Partnership, (Bloxwich East, Bloxwich West, Birchills Leamore, Blakenall);
2. **EAST** - Manor Farm Community Association (Walsall Pelsall, Brownhills, Aldridge North, Rushall-Shelfield and Walsall Wood, Aldridge South, Streetly, Pheasey Park Farm);
3. **SOUTH** - Accord Age Matter's (St Matthews, Paddock, Palfrey, Pleck);
4. **WEST** - Old Hall Peoples Partnership (Bentley and Darlaston North, Darlaston South, Willenhall North, Short Heath, Willenhall South).

On the 21st March 2020, the Government asked the NHS to write to 1.5M people nationally who were considered medically vulnerable. In that letter those vulnerable people, termed "shielded", were informed about the need to self-isolate themselves at home for a period of twelve weeks. Recipients of the letters were also offered the option of registering for a non-means tested free food delivery service to support them to remain in their home. The Council understands that 5045 individuals received an NHS shielded letter in Walsall. It is not yet known how many of these will formerly register with the national food assistance scheme.

On the 22nd June 2020 Matt Hancock, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care announced changes in the shielding programme and lifted restrictions for many individuals who for medical reasons needed to remain in their own homes. From the 6th July 2020 there would be greater freedom for shielded individuals and from the 1st August 2020 a pause to the shielded scheme.

The infrastructure that has been put in place to support the community response to COVID-19 is to continue to be used to deliver the on-going work. The Sneyd food parcel facility is being paused as demand has decreased significantly. However a stock of food parcels will be created to support ongoing activity.

As lockdown measures are eased different challenges have been identified and the new delivery model is designed to ensure issues have been mitigated.

7	How may the proposal affect each protected characteristic or group? The effect may be positive, negative, neutral or not known. Give reasons and if action is needed.			
	Characteristic	Affect	Reason	Action needed Yes / No
	Age	Positive	The over 65 population is increasing in the borough (Census 2011). Streetly ranks top of the over 65s category, closely followed by Aldridge, then Pelsall: the distribution of this age group is very much focused in the East. These are the more affluent areas of Walsall.	N

			<p>In contrast, the younger population is focused predominantly in areas within the North, South & West: Palfrey, Blakenall & Pleck - typically more deprived wards.</p> <p>As a result Hubs have been provided in 4 different localities by specialist third sector agencies who are able to more fully understand their local communities.</p> <p>As we move into the next phase of the easing of lockdown there is a risk that a proportion of our over 65 population may not be confident about leaving their homes. To mitigate this risk we are continuing the befriending service with an additional focus of supporting individuals to gain confidence in going outside their residence.</p>	
	Disability	Positive	<p>2011 Census results show that overall health is poorer in Walsall than in England and Wales. One in five residents have a limiting health condition: 10.4% are limited a lot, and a further 10.3% limited a little. 77.3% of residents say their health is good or very good – lower than the 81.2% nationally – with 7.3% experiencing bad or very bad health (5.6% nationally).</p> <p>The needs of those with a disability have been looked at by ensuring accessible services and ensuring we are able to understand this group and have flexibility to deliver the service with partners if requires. This support is available through the community hubs.</p>	N
	Gender reassignment	neutral	Some information is available	N

			<p>nationally however local data is currently unknown. Given the pressures that NHS services are facing in light of COVID-19, the NHS are advising no changes or increases in doses for hormone therapy, until the COVID-19 outbreak is over, as further blood tests cannot be guaranteed at this time. (Source https://gic.nhs.uk/info-support/hormone-therapy-during-the-covid-19-outbreak-patient-information/ Accessed 29/04/20)</p> <p>The service will be delivered irrespective of gender type and will deliver services in a professional manner but do note nationally there is unlikely to be customers from this group with an urgent prescription need.</p>	
	Marriage and civil partnership	Positive	<p>Census 2011 shows 46.5% of people are married, 11.3% cohabit with a member of the opposite sex, 0.7% live with a partner of the same sex, 24.6% are single and have never married or been in a registered same sex partnership, 8.2% are separated or divorced. There are 12,727 widowed people living in Walsall.</p> <p>The service will deliver services to this group and understands in some cases the households may have more than 1 person who may be isolating but also will understand the pressures of single person households.</p>	N
	Pregnancy and maternity	Positive	<p>In 2018, there were an estimated 839,043 conceptions to women of all ages in England and Wales compared with 847,204 in 2017, a decrease of nearly 1.0%. The conception rate for</p>	N

			<p>women under 18 years decreased for the 11th year in a row, the longest continued decrease since records began. (source https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/conceptionandfertilityrates/bulletins/conceptionstatistics/2018 Accessed 29/04/20)</p> <p>Where a service user is pregnant, priority is given to the household as this is one of the high risk groups identified by government account.</p>	
	Race	Positive	<p>Walsall has a 24% BAME population (Census 2011), and we aim to ensure the service provides flexibility in the food parcel type and service they deliver taking into account cultural issues particularly as many of our BAME resident live in the west of the borough. Origins data as at 2020 shows a large non –White British increases in most of Walsall Specifically WS5 postal sector (12% increase in non –white British) and a big concentration of Sikh arrivals into Walsall.</p> <p>There is ongoing research into the BAME population with a higher rate of infection identified and as more knowledge is gained our response will be adapted.</p>	N
	Religion or belief	Positive	<p>The religious make up of Walsall as per Census 2011 is 59.0% Christian, 19.7% No religion, 8.2% Muslim, 4.3% Sikh, 1.7% Hindu, 0.2% Buddhist. 16,174 people did not state a religion. Based on these figures we</p>	N

			are able to ensure we understand the dietary and religious requirements such as those requiring vegetarian/Vegan, Halaal and Kosher products and ensure we are flexible in the type of food parcel we deliver to people through the community hubs.	
	Sex	Positive	In the 2011 census the population of Walsall was 269,323 and is made up of approximately 51% females and 49% males. The average age of people in Walsall is 39, while the median age is also 39. 89.0% of people living in Walsall were born in England. Regardless of gender we will offer a service to all residents who require help and support. However, where there are cultural issues these will be taken into consideration.	N
	Sexual orientation	Positive	National statistics show the proportion of the UK population aged 16 years and over identifying as heterosexual or straight has decreased from 94.4% in 2012 to 93.2% in 2017. Over the last five years, the proportion of the UK population identifying as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) has increased from 1.5% in 2012 to 2.0% in 2017, although the latest figure is unchanged from 2016. In 2017, there were an estimated 1.1 million people aged 16 years and over identifying as LGB out of a UK population aged 16 years and over of 52.8 million. Males (2.3%) were more likely to identify as LGB than females (1.8%) in 2017. People aged 16 to 24 years were most likely to identify as	N

			<p>LGB in 2017 (4.2%). Source: https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/sexuality/bulletins/sexualidentityuk/2017, accessed 29/04/20)</p> <p>With the figures taken into consideration we will ensure the partners who are at the front line of our service have the right ethos and commitment to serving all of our communities.</p>	
8	<p>Does your proposal link with other proposals to have a cumulative effect on particular equality groups? If yes, give details.</p>			<p>(Delete one) No</p>
9	<p>Which justifiable action does the evidence, engagement and consultation feedback suggest you take?</p>			
A	<p>No major change required When no potential for discrimination or adverse impact is identified and all opportunities to promote equality have been taken.</p>			

Action and monitoring plan				
Action Date	Action	Responsibility	Outcome Date	Outcome
2021	Collate Service user data on protected characteristics and ensure consultation with third sector on the key lessons learnt	LA/delivery partners	Annual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand who has accessed service and what needs and demands are of different communities with regards to Covid 19 Ensure this information is used to ensure communities are represented at future consultation opportunities and intelligence is proactively used to target service

				delivery.

Update to EqIA	
Date	Detail
6 th July 2020	Amendments made as part of the redesign of the next phase of support due to the pause of shielding arrangements identified by the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care.
Use this section for updates following the commencement of your proposal.	

Contact us

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Inside Walsall: [http://int.walsall.gov.uk/Service information/Equality and diversity](http://int.walsall.gov.uk/Service%20information/Equality%20and%20diversity)