**LITTLE THETFORD PARISH COUNCIL**

**Report of Councillor Graham James, designated Coronavirus Lead**

1. This report has been prepared for the benefit of the Parish Council and the residents of Little Thetford Parish to update on the position to date, to summarise what is happening elsewhere across East Cambs District area and to propose the way forward for the next Phase of operations.
2. The Coronavirus emergency was discussed at the last meeting of the Parish Council The key decisions made at that meeting were that, in line with Government proposals, the Parish Council would take the lead on these matters locally, Councillor James was appointed as the designated lead on these matters and that a letter would be circulated around the village based on the discussions that evening to both inform residents and obtain information.
3. The up-date letter dated 27 March was then circulated for comment around the PC before being distributed to the village based on those discussions.  The very first paragraph of that letter says that we as a  Parish Council are taking on the lead role of co-coordinating the local response and caring for the vulnerable in our community. On the second page the letter explicitly states that as a Parish Council in line with Government requirements we would maintain daily contact with every person identified as Vulnerable for whatever reason, ideally by telephone.  That task was identified as being progressed alongside the Volunteers.
4. There was an initial 70% return rate for the data forms. Whilst in commercial terms this would be a good return, I felt that this was inadequate since we are dealing with vulnerable people. Councillor Stubbs and myself supported by one of the volunteers therefore undertook a sweep through most of the village. I can report that other than the Marina, there are 12 premises where we do not have any actual form nor spoken with the occupants.  However, in all cases we have verified with neighbours that there is nobody likely to be classed as vulnerable on the premises.
5. Having regard to Red Fen Road and Ely Road, we are missing several forms. Whilst most of the residents have been spoken to by Councillor Lamb and do not consider themselves as vulnerable, based on local knowledge I believe that this is not the case and several in Ely Road do need to be classified as such.
6. The forms reveal 169 vulnerable people.  However, this figure may be a little on the high side as, based on some of the information provided, I have included all those in the household where they are likely to be directly at risk themselves or could be towards the actual VP.  Based on households that equates to 92 premises where Vulnerable people are present.  During the data collection exercise, it also became clear that not everybody considered themselves as Vulnerable, nor did they necessarily want daily contact, accepting a need for regular contact to care for their physical and mental well-being.
7. Concerns were raised amongst the volunteers that the information gathered on the vulnerable people was not being shared with them and that that they were therefore not receiving the help they needed This is not the case and we can report that we have actually provided direct help to 20 households and others identified through local knowledge as particularly vulnerable have been approached and their current needs are adequately catered for.
8. However, in discussions with the vulnerable people and analysing the additional comments they made on their forms, in several cases they did not wish details of their vulnerability shared generally outside of the Parish Council with people they do not know, albeit residents of the village. An electronic proposal was circulated to the Parish Council on the lines of the agreed letter circulated on 27 March to allocate a Lead Councillor to each of the Zones to work with a small group of Volunteers to work with the identified vulnerable people to meet their physical and well-being needs. Not everybody agrees with that approach, preferring a more reactive approach and it is therefore something for discussion at this Parish Council meeting.
9. I participated in a conference call on Monday 6th April that had been organised by Wendy Lansdown who is one of the leads on coronavirus from Cambridgeshire CC. There had been problems in communicating the call which was called at short notice but about 20 people participated including representatives from various Parish Councils, Volunteer groups, Ely City Council and ECDC, with a County perspective provided by those representing their own groups.
10. The purpose of the call was to consider the current position of local groups in identifying and meeting the needs of residents with a second phase of how ECD and more centralised groups could assist. It was agreed that this was uncharted territory, and everyone was working as hard as they could with a focus on ensuring the physical and mental safety, care and well-being of the most vulnerable in our communities. It was further agreed that the call should become a weekly event but dividing the attendees into two area groupings.
11. Each person then gave a 2-minute summary of what they were doing and highlighted specific issues they faced. In summary the following things emerged:
    1. All those on the call have adopted a similar approach of using social media, linking to information from ECDC and elsewhere and attempting to communicate with residents. It was acknowledged that most vulnerable people are unlikely to actively use social media so additional support mechanisms were required.
    2. Parish & Town Councils are all taking the lead and have coordinated requests for help and identified volunteers. Some places are struggling for volunteers and there has been a generally big attrition rate as people themselves have to self-isolate or engage with larger entities such as the foodbank.
    3. Little Thetford have identified by far the largest number of vulnerable people. Other participants in the main decided that they needed to revisit their categorisation as they had bene too restrictive and would have missed people.
    4. Many of the participants had taken their volunteers under the Parish / Town Council insurance party to safeguard all involved and facilitate sharing of information.
    5. Highlighted concerns included GDPR, personal finance, prescriptions, confusion over the ECDC communications and instances of Domestic Violence.
       1. GDPR – the approach to this depended upon whether a centralised or localised system was used. For the former, when the data was collected it had included a caveat that data may be shared with third parties to deliver the service. Others had adopted a more localised approach of restricting data to small groups Zoned within their Parish.
       2. Personal Finance – whilst this was more prevalent in some areas than others, it had been identified as a problem to be resolved. Three alternative solutions were in train:
          1. Placing pin numbers in sealed envelopes with the card that were opened by Post Office
          2. ECDC examining as a matter of urgency the extension of pre-paid cards
          3. Care Network have a policy to refuse to deal with cash but will use individual’s cards for cashless payments providing those requesting sign a disclaimer on each occasion
       3. Prescriptions – all had faced difficulties with collecting prescriptions from pharmacies. A few places are using a local motorcycle training school that has volunteered to undertake a collection & delivery service. However, some are waiting for how the system will settle down with the introduction of the District Community Hubs and the new NHS Volunteer Scheme.
       4. ECDC communication – the recent letter circulated had caused some confusion. The rationale for circulating it was explained as whilst some Parishes were being very active and had a good solution in place, others (especially the more rural areas) were struggling. ECDC did not want anyone to ‘fall through the cracks’ and wanted to ensure all residents that help was available.
       5. Domestic Violence – There has been a sharp increase in the number of cases of Domestic Violence reported to the police and voluntary groups. We agreed that we would raise this with the volunteers to watch out for any signs of such abuse and to report it if concerned.
    6. Every area has adopted a response to meet local needs, and two distinct models are emerging Firstly, a centralised system that involves locally issued ID cards, central direction to individuals, prescribed policies etc. Secondly, a more localised approach involving small Zones coordinated through the Parish Council and utilising local volunteers. This has often involved Zone WhatsApp groups set up to facilitate those activities. **However, in every case the solution incorporated both a reactive and a proactive response since it was neither practical nor appropriate to rely solely on the vulnerable people asking for help.** A few anonymous cases were described by call participants.
    7. During the call I identified the following areas of Good Practice we should consider:
       1. Weekly one-page newsletter to all residents on what is happening
       2. Use of feedback forms as per the ECDC website for vulnerable people, residents and volunteers.
       3. Weekly telephone call with volunteers and the Parish Council to fine-tune the system and raise concerns
    8. The work of third party providers was raised.
       1. A common concern is the lack of support from Sanctuary Housing who went to a telephone response service very early in the Emergency, leaving some of the most vulnerable very isolated and exposed. This will be taken forward by ECDC but anyone having difficulties should raise with Sanctuary, ECDC or the local volunteers.
       2. Care Network representatives were on the call. They welcomed the visible help being provided by local communities which made a real difference to vulnerable people. They have adapted their services to meet the challenges of this emergency. They are available to offer advice and, if possible, help to individuals or volunteer groups. Two specific linked initiatives were mentioned to utilise the skills of their workforce who had been moved into self-isolation:
          1. Well-being telephone support
          2. Befriending telephone support
       3. The staff used on these activities are trained to provide this service and we are urged to provide this information to those residents who need such help
12. Proposed way forward:
    1. Appointment of Parish Councillors to act as leads for the identified 8 Zones
    2. Allocation of Volunteers from the Support Network to aid the Councillor
    3. Immediate contact with all those identified as vulnerable by those small groups to identify specific needs and agree frequency of contact with individuals and how such contact to be maintained viz telephone, personal visit or a mixture
    4. All volunteers registered with the Parish Council should be covered by our Insurance Policy
    5. To adopt the following areas of Good Practice:
       1. Weekly one-page newsletter to all residents on what is happening
       2. Use of feedback forms as per the ECDC website for vulnerable people, residents and volunteers.
       3. Weekly telephone call with volunteers and the Parish Council to fine-tune the system and raise concerns

Graham James

Parish Councillor and Designated Coronavirus Lead

8 April 2020