

SHEPTON MALLET COMMUNITY NETWORK

Inspiring hope, agency and action

September 2020

“As we emerge from this first phase of the Covid crisis, we need to move from reactive crisis management and start to rebuild on the basis of broad-based, designed-in resilience. Rather than asking “how do we stop this particular crisis happening again?” we need to challenge ourselves to ensure that when the next crisis happens, we are better able to manage and respond to it, whatever its nature. Resilience must be hard-wired into the mind-set of our society, institutions and economy.”

~ Matt Leach, CEO, Big Local

Summary

Since March 2020, the Shepton Mallet Coronavirus Volunteer Support Network has provided vital support and assistance across the community, with support from the Town Council and other partners. Key services have included shopping, prescriptions collection/delivery and befriending,

There is now an opportunity to bring together additional organisations and residents in Shepton Mallet to build on the excellent work of the volunteer network. Collaboration with many partners can facilitate solutions to a range of current issues as well as support prevention strategies and contingency planning for future scenarios. Co-ordinated projects and campaigns can also contribute to community optimism, hope and resilience.

An emerging Shepton Mallet Community Network can learn from the range of activities and ideas implemented in other towns in Mendip since March 2020.

POTENTIAL WORKING GROUPS AND AREAS OF FOCUS

Mental health and isolation

The Shepton Mallet Coronavirus Support Network, Health Connections Mendip and other local organisations have been supporting increasing numbers of people experiencing mental health problems, isolation and anxiety about the future. While additional resources are being invested into mental health services in Mendip through the Transformation Project (a joint NHS and VCSE project), we may see these statutory and voluntary sector services become overwhelmed - highlighting the need for community-based support to be available, and relevant training opportunities for local people and businesses.

- New Mental Health Hub due to be opened by MIND in Somerset in September 2020, as well as a regular Crisis Café that will provide support to local people in crisis over weekends

(with links into the Home Treatment Team) Additional funding could be sourced to extend the Crisis Café service if there is a local need.

- Opportunity to deliver Connect 5 mental wellbeing training throughout the community and train other trainers.
- Lack of face to face befriending is a long-term issue in the local area. Opportunity to learn from Frome organisation 'Active and in Touch' who are willing to share their expertise on setting up a befriending service (Befriending meeting organised with Shepton TC, SPARK and HCM for Sept 2020).
- Digital inclusion: Looking at people's needs now and looking forwards. Free Digital Connector training - for local people who want to help get neighbours, family and friends online. Obtain donated devices or new devices and distribute them in the community/to care homes.
- Opportunities for the whole community to process loss and grief related to Covid-19 (art exhibitions, church/spiritual events).

Community Car Scheme

These schemes are very cost effective and provide a much needed social service in areas where there is no alternative transport provision. Local residents are finding it increasingly difficult to access vital services such as health appointments, shopping or even social events due to lack of transport alternatives.

- Mendip Community Transport run the Slinky bus but this service is only available on certain days of the week and is limited to a relatively small operating area.
- The Slinky bus service is less suitable for those wishing to access health services, which in many cases will mean a journey outside the Slinky operating area.
- Mendip Community Transport usually runs a hospital car service which residents could normally use, but there is a minimum distance criterion of 12 miles, thus disqualifying a trip to a local community hospital.
- A community car scheme, where a volunteer driver uses their own vehicle, suits the individual nature of medical appointments, and is a more affordable way for customers to get there, sometimes the only alternative being an expensive taxi journey.

Poverty & food security

The situation may push local people into poverty as a result of job losses, and impact heavily on those who were already in precarious employment and housing situations. Looking forward to Autumn/Winter 2020, fuel poverty and food affordability are issues of concern.

- Potential funding towards extra fruit and veg for foodbank food parcels (similar project in Wells).

- Explore installing a Community Fridge in town centre (like the ones in Frome and Glastonbury).
- Support and promote 'The Kitchen' in Shepton - the low cost meal prep service for those home from hospital who are isolated.
- Explore setting up regular 'Eat Well' cooking workshops.
- Potential partnership opportunities with schools and Food Forest Project.
- Other key partners include the Shepton Mallet food bank run by the Salvation Army, Windsor Hill Wood, the food banks in Coleford & Evercreech and Mendip Credit Union.
- Warm Homes training - for local people who want to support others to access grants and opportunities to make homes more energy efficient.
- Community Connector training with a focus on Healthy Lifestyles including healthy eating.
- Pay it Forwards template from Frome could be used as a Shepton wide idea.

Shepton Mallet Coronavirus Support Network

- Provide practical and emotional support to organisers.
- Support ongoing volunteer recruitment, retention, training and recognition.
- Assisted in-person shopping service (similar project being launched in Wells)
- Generate funding for projects.
- Potential 'Street Connector' project – local people who agree to occasionally share information/resources and receive feedback in their local area. They may wish to be formal volunteers and access training (a local organisation or network would need to host the volunteers).

Business & skills development

- Free one to one support/mentoring service - provided by volunteers (similar service running in Wells). Other spaces could be organised to enable discussion of new business ideas, development of CICs and how to access funding, with support from Spark Somerset..
- Community Ideas Cafes - spaces where people can meet to share ideas for a range of community projects.
- Free training and skills development workshops - could seek involvement and funding from Somerset Skills & Learning.
- Funding and support for the arts.
- 'Spend Local' campaign.
- Training opportunities for businesses eg mental health training, Community Connector signposting training.

Young people and families

- Practical and emotional support for parents.
- New projects for young people, developed by young people.
- Arts and music projects similar to the Glastonbury Mural Trail.

- Breakfast club for families during all school holidays (similar project in Street).
- Play workers/storytellers working in parks and outdoor spaces (similar project in Frome).
- Support for home-schooling families as more people may be considering this.
- Partners could be the Art Bank, Young Somerset and Salvation Army who run a mother's and toddlers group, and SASP.
- Sports activities for families such as Park Run.

Compassionate Shepton Mallet

- Potential to launch 'Compassionate Shepton Mallet' or 'LOVE Shepton Mallet' campaign to promote connection, kindness, tolerance and safety (*following the buy-in of local people/orgs*).
- Plan events in the town e.g. Collett Park for an open-air community meal (at an appropriate time).
- Christmas planning for those who can't meet family or who would usually have gone to a community lunch.

Environment & sustainability

- Volunteers to participate in a range of outdoor initiatives, e.g. 'Incredible Edible' style projects and litter picking.
- Set up regular Repair Cafe and 'Library of Things' (both active projects in Frome).
- Key partners could include Forest Food Project and Sustainable Shepton Mallet.

Additional considerations

- Focus on people's strengths and skills; everyone in the community to be seen for both their capacity to contribute and to receive. For example, someone who has a volunteer shopping regularly for them, may themselves be a telephone befriender for another person.
- Avoid disempowering language such as 'vulnerable' and 'dependency'. Important to use language that supports agency.
- Everyone living and working in the town has an investment in and responsibility towards building a thriving community.
- Projects by local people, for local people. There are many residents with great ideas and the energy to make things happen - contexts are needed to facilitate this.
- Importance of empowering residents, organisations and businesses with knowledge about a range of available local services and how to confidently signpost.
- Potential to create a new charitable organisation through which to apply for funds on behalf of the Network.

Suggested next steps

- **September onwards:** Regular, ongoing meetings with a central, co-ordinating team including the Town Council, members from the Shepton Mallet Coronavirus Support Network, Chamber of Commerce and Health Connections Mendip.
- **Early October:** Invitation to a range of stakeholders to participate in the Network, discuss ideas and ways of working together.