

SHORT REPORT	
Subject Matter	Support for Elderly and Vulnerable Residents
Lead Officer	Alison Knight, Executive Director – Neighbourhoods Stuart Lackenby, Director of Adult Social Care
Date	27 th May 2020
Decision	To note the progress made in in supporting Elderly and Vulnerable Residents.



1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. This report provides an update to the Emergency Committee on the council’s response to supporting vulnerable/shielding people in our communities who are unable to leave their property due to the increased risk to them if they were to contract COVID-19.
- 1.2. It summarises how vulnerable people have been identified and the support that has been put in place to assist them during the current crisis.

2. Background

- 2.1. On the 24th March 2020 the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government issued guidance outlining the need for a partnership approach between national and local agencies to support those people in our communities who are at the highest risk of severe illness (‘the clinically extremely vulnerable’) if they contract COVID-19 and therefore have been advised to isolate themselves (“shielding”) for a period of time.
- 2.2. Shielding is designed to protect people from serious illness as well as help manage the current demand being experienced by the NHS. There are three strands of support being offered people who need to shield and do not have a close network of support available to them:
 - Food: delivery of basic food parcels directly to people’s doorsteps
 - Medicines: provision of prescription medication delivered by community pharmacies.

- Social contact: local authorities, working with the voluntary and community sector, providing social support to people who might be feeling isolated at this difficult time.

2.3. Whilst the introduction of shielding aims to identify and support people within communities who will require help and support due to their current and recent medical history, the council also recognises the ‘shielding list’ does not identify everyone who either may be vulnerable or those who may require support and assistance during this crisis. We have therefore identified a local authority vulnerable-risk group to sit alongside the information we receive from the NHS about people who are currently shielding and those who are identified as high risk.

2.4. In identifying our vulnerable group, we used information from council departments such as Adult Social Care, Revenues & Benefits and Neighbourhoods & Communities and identified those at most risk by risk factors such as age group, location and specific vulnerability factors we are aware of. The data used to identify our vulnerable group, when combined with the shielding group identifies **23,227** people in Sandwell. Within this overall number there are people identified on the shielding data set who have also been identified within our vulnerable group. This total number of people however fluctuates as new people are added to the shielding list or where people are removed.

Group	Number of Residents
Shielded group	12,618
Vulnerable group	10,609

3. Update on proactive work with Vulnerable and Shielding residents

3.1. Whilst Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government guidance around Shielding is centred around reactive support to vulnerable/Shielding people, the council took forward a range of proactive measure to ensure that the most vulnerable people in our communities knew how to get in touch with the council if they needed help and understood the support available.

3.2. Since the introduction of the approach and we have reached out to both the ‘Shielding group’ and our ‘Local Authority vulnerable group’ as follows.

- Two separate letters have been sent to every household in Sandwell (**135,400 households**) advising them of the Councils emergency contact numbers, email address and available support. These letters also directed people to Government guidance on COVID-19
- A Further targeted letter was sent to **28,000** households in Sandwell who had a person over 70 living at the address that was registered with a local GP.

- A 60-strong team, made up from redeployed Council officers has proactively contacted **18,012** of the local Shielding/Vulnerable Group with the remaining **people** to be contacted by mid-June 2020.
- Where contact details for a potentially vulnerable person have not been available a “door knocking exercise” has been undertaken to identify the support needs of these individuals.

3.3. This proactive work has resulted in the following outcomes being taken forward for all contacted residents;

- Confirmation that no further support is required at this time
- Referral for Practical Support for urgent essential supplies – **678** people
- Referral for urgent Care and Support – **165** people
- Support from the community and voluntary sector – **1021** people

3.4. Once the remaining **people** have been contacted, the council will then solely focus on its reactive response to support vulnerable residents. Whilst shielding individuals will receive a follow up call to offer “a buddying service” for the remainder of the requirement to shield. The need for further proactive work will be reviewed in the context of potential future Government Guidance and how the COVID-19 pandemic progresses.

4. Update on reactive work with Vulnerable and Shielding residents

4.1. The role of the council to support people within the Shielding group has been significantly expanded through subsequent Government guidance that has resulted daily in the council receiving the following data, requiring response;

- People registering for a food package through 101
- New people added to the shielding list who have registered for support on the Governments website. This can be either urgent food requirements or the need for care and support.
- People on the Shielding list who the Government have been unable to contact.

4.2. The council is currently receiving the details of around **40** new residents daily. The council's response to this data is consistent with that provided through the councils proactive approach. The reactive approach is also supporting residents who contact the council because of its proactive correspondence and calls to local vulnerable people.

5. Sourcing and ongoing delivery of Food Parcels to vulnerable/elderly residents and those contacting the Emergency Helpline

- 5.1. Where it has been identified a resident is in urgent need of essential supplies, referrals have been made to the “Central Hub”, who are able to arrange for the provision of a basic package of food and household essentials to be supplied.
- 5.2. As set out in the Emergency Committee report of 14th April 2020, a significant number of employees from across the council have come together to help with packaging of food and deliveries at the Tipton Sports Academy.
- 5.3. By 21st May 2020, we had delivered 7608 parcels to those in need. Since the last report in April, parcels have also been delivered to 359 children with the equivalent of a free school meal each day.
- 5.4. In addition, food parcels are being provided to 150 vulnerable families identified by schools and 20 households living in temporary accommodation have been supported with small parcels of essentials every 2 weeks.
- 5.5. The referral process has been streamlined, enabling food parcels to be distributed within 2 hours, if not sooner. Weekend cover is provided via Community Alarms and they will deliver parcels to residents in need.
- 5.6. There has been an increase in issues relating to the delivery of government parcels - the council is now getting 6-8 specific referrals a week. These can range from parcels not being delivered, parcels being left in communal areas rather than at specific addresses and parcels being delivered that have been cancelled. These issues continue to be raised with the supplier and MHCLG. However, there is some risk that local residents feel these issues relate to the Council’s Food Hub.
- 5.7. Substantial amounts of stock is being issued to four food banks across the borough; West Bromwich, Smethwick, Brushstrokes and Baking Bread Wednesbury. This is food that has been purchased by the council and donated by local organisations.

6. Support to residents through volunteer support services with SCVO and the voluntary sector community offer.

- 6.1. Through either proactive or reactive contact, vulnerable/shielding residents who require ongoing support have been referred through for support from the voluntary sector. SCVO had placed 287 volunteers as at 18th May 2020, 61 volunteers for the befriending service and provided support for a further 673 people via the Community Offer.
- 6.2. The **Good Neighbours** scheme – provides additional support for residents who under normal circumstances would be perfectly able to lead an independent life and would not need on-going support from the council if they did not have to shield or self-isolate. 145 volunteers (as at 18th May 2020) are providing on-going practical help with shopping, staying in touch (by phone or online), dog walking, picking up prescriptions etc, until the coronavirus emergency is over.

6.3. **Sandwell Together befriending service** - this enables people to keep in touch by phone or Facetime. The service is primarily for people who are socially isolating (either short term or for the duration of the emergency). This includes vulnerable people in care homes where contact time with family has been reduced. Contact can vary from:

- a regular short call to keep in touch and check that things are ok
- longer chats to pass the time of day and reduce social isolation

61 volunteers are participating and supporting local people as part of the befriending service. A positive example is given below:

6.4. In addition, a number of volunteers have been placed with local foodbanks and some with the NHS volunteer scheme.

6.5. **Community Offer** - this offer is provided in partnership with a number of voluntary sector organisations and provides additional support for residents who may be vulnerable and at risk and have on-going needs where a range of support will help them to manage their situation to cope for the duration of the emergency. Teams of community-based staff provide a range of practical support for Sandwell residents and in addition will support both the Enhanced Assessment Beds and Hospital discharge where required. As at 18th May 673 people were being supported via this route.

6.6. Through the range of schemes available, the voluntary sector has been effective in providing ongoing support to around **1021** residents.

7. ONGOING RISKS

Below are key ongoing risks associated with the council's support to Vulnerable/Shielding Groups.

7.1. Data and guidance from MHCLG continues to be inconsistent requiring considerable validation before work is taken forward. Recent guidance from MHCLG identified a set of over 20 outcomes which MHCLG proposed that councils retrospectively apply to activity undertaken. For Sandwell this means revisiting 1800 individual records. Over 90 councils have made representations to the government challenging this expectation.

7.2. Whilst all residents identified as being “shielded” or in the wider “vulnerable” group will have been contacted via telephone or at their premises, there is always a risk that some may be uncontactable and may not receive support.

7.3. As the council considers its Reset and Recovery plan, there is need to maintain the capacity of the welfare agents supporting vulnerable/shielding groups for the forthcoming months. As council services exit the response phase, officers redeployed as welfare agents and in the food, hub will return to their substantive roles potentially

resulting in the council being unable to deliver against the Governments guidance on support to shielding residents.

- 7.4. Whilst there is still a risk that supplies may run low at the Food Hub, the council has now agreed bulk orders with a smaller number of approved suppliers, although some items are still in limited supply.
- 7.5. Cost of Food Hub and Foodbank support –at present overall costs of food continue to average at about £30,000 per week. This does not include the cost of stock being stored at Tipton Sports Academy.
- 7.6. Keeping residents and volunteers as safe as possible: When Sandwell Community Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) match a resident to a volunteer they will reinforce the message that the resident is being supported by another resident and the checking process that has been undertaken. The resident can contact SCVO if they are not happy with the arrangement. They will give a similar message to volunteers. Volunteers are given guidelines on social distancing, hand washing, limiting travel and what to do if they have a concern about a resident. Volunteers are not expected to enter a resident's house or take their bank details; the council continues to reinforce this message with residents to limit risks associated with scams and doorstep crime.
- 7.7. Volunteer capacity has the potential to be significantly reduced if the Government accelerates the reduction of its furlough scheme.

8. NEXT STEPS

- 8.1. Review the continued need for the food hub with Summer approaching, there will still be a need to support vulnerable families. Clearly the food hub location will need to be reviewed if Government guidance re. leisure centre closures are eventually relaxed.
- 8.2. Continue to monitor numbers of referrals into Good Neighbours, Community Offer and Sandwell Together: The number of repeat calls into the council's emergency helpline will be monitored and a case management approach will be adopted to tailor the support offered. The number of emergency food parcels will continue to be monitored.
- 8.3. Continue to respond to requests for support from residents alongside both vulnerable and shielding individuals.
- 8.4. Continue dialogue with MHCLG on a practical and effective outcomes framework.
- 8.5. Factor any continued support into the Reset and Recovery Plan.