

CORPORATE AND COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 18 NOVEMBER 2020

UPDATE ON HERE2HELP IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19

Summary

1. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility (CMR) for Communities and the Assistant Director for Communities have been invited to attend the meeting to provide an update on the Councils Here2Help response as a result of the Coronavirus Pandemic (COVID-19).

Background

2. Here2Help was launched as One Worcestershire's community action response with the sole aim of supporting residents through the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. The Here2Help campaign provides a dedicated response service for all residents who ask for help and those individuals and organisations who offer to help. When launched it aimed to complement the national scheme to support those individuals who were extremely vulnerable and being the most at risk of becoming severely ill from COVID-19 (our shielded cohort) and the NHS Volunteer Responders initiative.
4. The purpose of Here2Help is to provide support to people in Worcestershire who are having to self-isolate and/or have additional needs due to the COVID-19 outbreak and cannot get that help and support from friends, family or neighbours.

The Here2Help Service

5. Following the lockdown announcement in March 2020, libraries were closed and 61 library staff alongside other officers across Worcestershire County Council and Worcestershire Children First were re-deployed to provide capacity so that the Here2Help service would be fully responsive to the expected demand.
6. As lockdown restrictions eased, plans were put in place for the phased re-opening of libraries and public health colleagues focus needed to move towards the Local Outbreak Response Team (LORT). This provided the opportunity to reflect on Here2Help in terms of how it had operated, its legacy and vision moving forward, including its resource and long-term sustainability. While the demand had reduced it was important that Here2Help remained operational be it on a lower level so that if the demand increased the service was easily "dialled up" to respond.
7. It was agreed that the Customer Service Contact Centre would take on responsibility for telephony and case work from 1 September 2020. As part of the transition the Here2Help Handbook was developed and a phased period of transition

enabled the team to become more familiar with the system, processes and receive peer support from Library and Public Health staff. To increase capacity and knowledge within the Customer Service contact centre, 4 Well-being Advisers have been seconded from Community First into the service bringing with them specialist mental health and well-being knowledge.

8. Requests for help peaked in the week commencing 30 March 2020 with 523 requests received via the webpage or by phone with the majority of requests seeking support with accessing food and supplies. Call volumes decreased over summer and the telephone line opening hours were scaled back to reflect the reduction in demand at that time. The hours are currently Monday - Thursday 9-5pm and Friday 9-4.30pm however outside of these times, residents are still able to log requests for help and offers of help via the webpage. The number of requests for help have increased slightly in recent weeks from a low of 3 requests received in the week commencing 30 August 2020 up to 20 requests received in the week commencing 12 October 2020. Although the number of requests remain low, there has been an increase in requests for help coming from individuals/families self-isolating under the Test and Trace programme who require advice and help with finances and food deliveries (see Appendix 1 for detailed monthly breakdown).

9. The Here2Help team is also supporting the LORT by taking telephone enquiries from the general public who have COVID-19 related queries. A new telephone service with interactive voice response (IVR) options is being developed to route calls to appropriate teams in the most efficient way. This will be supported by additional information. There are also developments planned to ensure that the website provides appropriate signposting.

Here2Help System

10. Building on what has been learnt since Here2Help was put in place, there have been a range of developments made to streamline the Here2Help system; informed by those actively using it. These developments will work to ensure that the Here2Help service continues to be responsible and efficient for both the public and those staff working in the service. The focus of these improvements to date have been to develop the system in a way that will support the service to respond effectively to any further local lockdown or outbreak situation and have included:

- changes to the volunteer registration form to improve information collection;
- improved system search options to streamline the matching of requests for help with volunteers and automate some of the processes;
- introduction of a secure personalised online health declaration form to record any factors that might indicate a volunteer is at an increased risk of becoming seriously ill if they were to catch COVID-19 e.g. where they are classified as extremely clinically vulnerable;
- Introduction of a multi-step process that works alongside the Council's Disclosure Barring Service team to obtain Disclosure and Barring (DBS) clearance for Here2Help volunteers.

Volunteers

11. As lockdown restrictions eased and the national shielding programme paused, the number of requests for help through Here2Help decreased. At the same time, many volunteers who were previously furloughed, returned to work.

12. As part of the preparation moving forward, a series of regular updates were developed to keep volunteers engaged. This was to ensure the Here2Help system did not disengage with any volunteers and that Worcestershire is prepared to respond should there be a local lockdown situation. These communications are expected to continue being sent out on a regular basis to those who sign up to be volunteers.

13. Volunteers were also encouraged to continue to proceed through the validation process to become DBS cleared as part of the preparation work undertaken to ensure that Here2Help will be able to support those who have been directly affected by Coronavirus receive the help and support they need as we move into winter.

14. Although we are not currently actively recruiting, residents are still able to and continue to register as a volunteer via the Here2Help portal.

Organised Volunteer Support - GP Flu Clinics

15. The NHS national Flu Vaccine Programme has been significantly increased this year to ensure high levels of protection to the population in the context of the ongoing challenges from COVID-19.

16. GP Practices and Primary Care Networks (PCNs) are working individually and collectively to deliver this increased programme in the most timely and effective way possible, however, this represents a significant additional burden on primary care, which is already stretched by the demands of COVID-19.

17. Herefordshire and Worcestershire Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and the Council have worked together to arrange for Here2Help volunteers to support GP Practices and Primary Care Networks as they deliver the enhanced Flu Vaccination programme.

18. The type of support provided by volunteers included:

- Assisted with parking at the site – directing to spaces and where necessary asking people to return later in the clinic;
- Managed queues to ensure safe social distancing and/or supporting safe and rapid exit;
- Supporting flow through the clinic: e.g. informing patients of wearing masks in cars; rolling sleeves up; exit requirements, etc;
- Supported practice requirements during clinics – e.g. restocking of supplies; making tea/coffee for clinical team.

19. Four GP Surgeries requested Here2Help volunteers to help assist with the running of twenty additional flu clinics throughout September and October. Approximately 200 hours of volunteering were provided helping to deliver over 3000 additional flu vaccinations.

Organised Volunteer Support - Care Homes Volunteer Support

20. Amongst the many offers of help Here2Help received were some from people who were having to self-isolate but were interested in offering non face-to-face assistance (for example telephone support). At the same time Here2Help were aware that residential homes faced a range of issues including that residents were missing social interaction with friends, family and the local community.

21. A mutually beneficial 'befriending' approach was piloted where volunteers were matched with residents in residential homes through telephone or other methods of communications such as letters, postcards etc.

22. The befriending scheme is currently running in two residential homes. In one of the homes three volunteers have each befriended one resident, whereas the other home is operating a slightly different, more flexible, model with three volunteers having initially befriended ten residents. In the second home the individual residents being supported have changed over time due to illness, or new residents expressing an interest in joining the scheme, and there is an expectation that more volunteers will become involved if needed.

Emotional Resilience Online Course

23. Worcestershire County Council's learning and development department developed a series of bitesize sessions to help any member of staff who would benefit from some support in relation to managing isolation, homeworking and the general impact of balancing daily life under these circumstances.

24. The sessions were designed to provide the necessary tools and techniques to help individuals develop strategies for managing through this challenging period as effectively as possible and it was recognised that Care Home Managers would also welcome the opportunity to take part.

25. The courses were tailored and a total of 19 emotional resilience online course sessions were held with 79 care home managers attending. The Learning and Development Team also created a personal resilience workbook and slide deck to further equip participants to provide support to their staff following the course.

Districts & Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Organisations

26. Regular meetings still take place between the County and District Councils community representatives and a representative from the voluntary sector is now part of this group to share local information on a range of issues including the distribution of Government funding (e.g. for food and essential supplies), organisational data in the H2H database accessed by all partners, Test and Trace Payments, VCS capacity and support, volunteering updates, Enhanced Contact Tracing etc. This is an open forum for sharing information, have oversight of what is happening across the county and best practice and encouraging a consistent approach across the county.

Links to Integrated Well Being Offer (IWBO) Developments

27. The Here2Help Service has provided much learning in how to provide a co-ordinated emergency response across the County as well as highlighting the strength in all our communities and partners to support across a range of areas and needs. This valuable learning is being used to provide a foundation for the Integrated Health and Well-being Hub Programme. This is an ambitious Early Intervention and Prevention agenda which will be developed over a period of time with partners, aiming to deliver positive outcomes to Worcestershire residents supporting them to consider how their health and well-being needs can best be met. This work will depend on taking a creative strength-based approach, ensuring communities both organisations and individuals are able to shape and influence the developments of this programme.

Purpose of the Meeting

The Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel is asked to:

- (a) Consider the information in the update
- (b) Determine whether it would wish to carry out any further Scrutiny, and
- (c) Agree whether it would wish to make any comments to the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities.

Supporting Information

Appendix 1 – Proportion of ‘Requests for Help’ relating to each ‘Category of Support’

Contact Points

Hannah Needham, Assistant Director: Communities
Email: HNeedham@worcestershire.gov.uk

Specific Contact Points for this report

Samantha Morris/Alyson Grice, Overview and Scrutiny Officers Tel: 01905 844962
Email: scrutiny@worcestershire.gov.uk

Background Papers

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Strategic Director of People) the following are the background papers relating to the subject matter of this report:

- [Agenda and Minutes of the Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel 17 June 2020](#)

[All agendas and minutes are available on the Council's website here.](#)