

Council Priority: Strong and Resilient Communities – Recovery Plan

Shielding – Vulnerable people and the Voluntary Sector

1. Since the onset of the pandemic, Mid Sussex has the third highest number of “Shielded” residents classed as “extremely clinically vulnerable” in West Sussex but, possibly, as a consequence of its resilient community, only the fourth highest number receiving government food deliveries and the second lowest number of vulnerable residents asking the Council for assistance. Of the District population, approximately 16% are over 70.
2. Mid Sussex had a significantly higher number of deaths in the first 2-3 weeks of the Covid-19 pandemic than the similar Districts of Horsham and Chichester and compared to the national average. Proximity to London and Gatwick airport, a large number of care homes in the District and a mobile, commuting, population may all have contributed to this.
3. Mid Sussex District Council has a long history of collaborative community development and engagement with a strong local Community and Voluntary Sector (CVS) as well as other local statutory and private sector partners. The impact and legacy of this work and the powerful relationships it has fostered, was realised in recent months as this Council, its partners and its communities, mobilised to respond, attend to the needs of and support the vulnerable communities of our District.
4. The local community response to the pandemic saw a large upsurge in community volunteering through a variety of pre-existing and new platforms including referrals through Mid Sussex Voluntary Action (MSVA), the establishment of the nationally co-ordinated NHS volunteer programme and the rapidly mobilised local groups. This has been particularly pertinent given the impact that the pandemic has had on the traditional volunteer base of many of our local third sector organisations which tend to rely on older people.
5. The pandemic has, however, taken its toll on the resilience of the CVS. Depending on their scale and the level of use; some have, or will be, incurring unexpected costs that they will need to recover at a time when many will have lost significant funds through an inability to hold income generating and fundraising activities. For organisations that have not been directly involved in the Covid-19 response, they face a very new landscape when they remobilise with a need for new delivery models and a changed volunteer demographic. Some organisations face difficulties in using their traditional meeting places due to social distancing or a reluctance of clients to return to them. Financial assistance has been provided to many groups within the District with 138 having accessed either Business or Discretionary Grants via the Council.
6. The Council currently provides support to vulnerable members of our community:
 - Discretionary Housing Payments fund of £267,931 which provides support to households who are threatened with or are homeless;
 - Council Tax Support Scheme which provides support to working age people on low incomes and has paid an additional £500k to nearly 700 new working age recipients, as well as larger amounts to existing customers during the pandemic. The Council is not proposing to amend its Council Tax Support scheme in 2020/21;

- Money Advice and Pension (MAPS) Service pilot which assists people with independent debt advice. This prepares the Council for the introduction of Breathing Space, which will make the debt referral process legal from May 2021.
7. As well as providing financial support we are mindful of the importance of providing wellbeing support to vulnerable residents through the work of the Council's health and wellbeing team. In response to the pandemic the Council supported West Sussex County Council in its work to assist those in the Government's 'Shield' and those in a Covid-19 vulnerable group. By the end of July there were 5,373 people in the shield and 384 Covid-19 vulnerable people receiving support in Mid Sussex.
 8. The District enjoys 470 hectares of open space spread across 590 open spaces, 123 play areas and 11 outdoors gyms. With the restrictions and rules on social distancing in place, these facilities play an important health and wellbeing function for residents.
 9. There are several Council services which have and will continue to be, key to the District's community response, recovery and future resilience in the aftermath of the pandemic. The following outlines some of the work undertaken to date to support our communities and most vulnerable residents together with the emergent priorities for the coming 18 months to ensure Mid Sussex has a positive legacy of community resilience from this most challenging time.

Supporting those at risk of homelessness

10. As reported to Cabinet on 1st June 2020 and Scrutiny on 17th June 2020, in March the Council responded to the Government requirement under the Coronavirus Act to bring "everyone in" who was either sleeping rough or at risk of rough sleeping.
11. This provided a unique opportunity to address rough sleeping. However, it also presented a challenge in terms of providing temporary accommodation. Currently the Council, on Government's advice, continue to provide accommodation to this cohort whilst working to find longer term sustainable solutions.
12. At the height of the pandemic we accommodated 10 rough sleepers, a number comparable with Chichester, Horsham and the national average. MHCLG has announced that funding will be made available, subject to bids in August, for both capital and revenue monies to help the Council with its work to provide those rough sleepers with sustainable housing solutions.
13. To assist in the work the Council has agreed to acquire 10 units of accommodation for vulnerable homeless persons which will also provide support. In addition to this we are working in partnership with Clarion Housing Association and Turning Tides to pilot a Housing First project to provide accommodation for vulnerable adults with complex needs.
14. In March the Government also introduced regulations to mitigate the impact on homelessness by suspending all possession proceedings. This suspension is due to be lifted at the end of August. We know that both rent and mortgage arrears are building up due to the impact of the pandemic on household incomes and that these pressures will increase when furlough ends. As a result, the Council is anticipating a spike in homelessness due to financial pressure and family breakdown. There has already been a 43% increase in those seeking Housing Benefit assistance.

15. The Council has already seen an unprecedented demand for assistance from those threatened with homelessness or those already homeless and have over 100 households in temporary accommodation, a 30% increase from the previous year. We have worked closely with agencies such as Turning Tides to ensure those in temporary accommodation and needing support have received it.
16. The challenge now is in sustaining these arrangements and success will rely on the commitment from the Government and support from our partners, particularly the voluntary sector, to secure long-term arrangements for this vulnerable group.

Supporting people into and back to work

17. Significant numbers of young people between the age of 18 and 24 will be leaving full time education this summer. Traditionally, this age group is disadvantaged in the labour market and the pandemic will exacerbate this situation. Data indicates that the national claimant rate for 18-24 year olds has more than doubled since February from 4.1% to 8.7%. This situation is likely to widen inequalities making the situation more difficult for vulnerable and disadvantaged young people. To assist local businesses to support job seekers, we are working in partnership with the Department for Work and Pensions and education establishments through the Journey to Work scheme.

Strong and Resilient Communities – Recovery Plan 2020/21 and 2021/22

SHORT TERM
1. Enable the community infrastructure necessary for self -determined communities to flourish:
(i) Work with the Mid Sussex Partnership (MSP) to provide systemic leadership that co-ordinates recovery efforts across all partners;
(ii) Refocus the economic and community grants budget by adding £300k in the current year. The purpose would be to support businesses and the local community with Covid-19 recovery. This would be administered by the Council's Cabinet Grants Panel, as currently. Criteria for the grants will be developed.
(iii) In recognition of their important role for the health and wellbeing of the community, ensure the Council's parks, open spaces, sports pitches and countryside sites can open and operate safely, and continue to actively promote their benefits;
(iv) Actively work with Places Leisure to ensure indoor leisure facilities can reopen safely;
(v) Extend the publicity of the advice and support services available to those who are facing financial and housing hardships.
2. Support Communities and Build Resilience:
(i) Establish a District Narrative of Need to fully understand the impacts of the pandemic on our communities and their needs and strengths both in the short and longer term;
(ii) Continue to provide and promote the virtual delivery models of wellbeing hub services to individuals and businesses whilst concurrently developing new practice in preparation for a return of face to face delivery;
(iii) Build on the pilot "Playdays@Home" programme to deliver summer programme of youth and family engagement and support;
(iv) Prioritise Disabled Facility Grant work to the most vulnerable households which were delayed during lockdown;
(v) Support WSCC in its role in the national test and trace system to extend the capacity of local Outbreak Control Teams, including mapping and monitoring specific at-risk sectors;
(vi) Prioritise benefits and Council Tax support for those suffering from the impact of the pandemic over the next three years, including the award of up to £200 Hardship for 2020/21.

3. Support those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness:
(i) Maximise the use of Discretionary Housing Payments to help vulnerable residents with housing costs not covered by benefits and other financial help;
(ii) Develop personal pathways to settled accommodation for each rough sleeper placed under the Coronavirus Act 2020 as required by the Government;
(iii) Ensure those accommodated under a Homelessness Reduction Act including both families with children and single vulnerable people are enabled to move on into settled accommodation as quickly as possible;
(iv) Develop a robust bid for capital and revenue funding from the MHCLG funding programme to provide both accommodation and support to meet the ongoing needs of rough sleepers and single vulnerable households in Mid Sussex;
(v) Use Flexible Homelessness Support Grant to prevent homelessness and alleviate homelessness to deliver the objectives in the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.
MEDIUM TERM
4. Enable the community infrastructure necessary for self-determined communities to flourish:
(i) Proactively engage with CVS organisations where S106 funds or other external funds are available to encourage Covid-19 Secure building adaptation and improvement work to be delivered via the Facilities Grant Programme;
(ii) Continue with the Parks Investment Programme, delivering the agreed programme of prioritised playground improvements, and implementing the masterplans for the district's key destination parks.
5. Support Communities and Build Resilience:
(i) Develop a programme of targeted youth community development and support;
(ii) Work collaboratively with the CCG and voluntary sector to provide targeted health and wellbeing interventions for those vulnerable to, recovering from or impacted by the pandemic;
(iii) Complete a new community development framework to support the development and strengthening of community anchor organisations;
(iv) Work with the CVS and local communities to ensure that the responsive social action seen during the Covid-19 response can be maintained and built into preventative action for the future;
(v) Consider extending the Journey to Work scheme to continue to provide support to job seekers and local businesses.

6. Provide support to those in financial need:

- (i) Consider the implementation of a more ethical collection of Local Taxation, including avoiding the use of Enforcement Agents.

7. Support those at risk of homelessness:

- (i) Work with all households at risk of homelessness, including those who have lost their employment and/or come to the end of their furlough and who can no longer meet their housing costs to support them to retain their current housing or to obtain an affordable alternative;
- (ii) Establish sustainable housing pathways for rough sleepers including working with Brighton Housing Trust /Sussex Oakleaf to expand provision to enable rough sleepers as well as other single vulnerable people to be accommodated;
- (iii) Progress the expansion of the temporary accommodation project to provide 10 units of accommodation for single vulnerable homeless people requiring support and 5 additional units for homeless families;
- (iv) Review the housing support and prevention provision including pathways for vulnerable people with complex needs to ensure vulnerable households receive the support they need to sustain settled housing;
- (v) Ensure a focus on support tenancy sustainment and prevention to minimise the use of temporary accommodation;
- (vi) Deliver the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025 action plan.

LONG TERM

8. Enable and deliver the community infrastructure necessary for self-determined communities to flourish:

- (i) Review Service Level Agreements and other commissioning arrangements with CVS organisations and Parish Councils, as they expire to co-design operational outcomes and diversify delivery channels such that they continue to support vulnerable people and communities.

9. Support Communities and Build Resilience:

- (i) Deliver a programme of targeted, evidence-led community development and support;
- (ii) Deliver the Community Development and Engagement Framework in partnership with the Mid Sussex Partnership.

10. Provide support to those in financial need:

- (i) Participate fully in the implementation of Breathing Space in May 2021, giving independent debt advice to residents and businesses facing financial challenges.

11. Support those at risk of homelessness:

- (i) Review the Housing Register and Allocation Scheme to ensure it is appropriately prioritising and supporting move on for homeless households, including rough sleepers; and that there are no barriers to meeting their needs, including those of rough sleepers;
- (ii) Ensure that the delivery of affordable housing is maximised through the effective application of planning policies;
- (iii) Continue to develop options to ensure a supply of gypsy and traveller accommodation.