

Item 7.2

Hawkhurst Community Support Group – update

April 2020

Introduction

Hawkhurst Parish Council, working with local volunteers, has set up **Hawkhurst Community Support Group (HCSG)**. In Hawkhurst, as elsewhere, there has been a wonderful response to COVID-19 from people eager to help their neighbours and community. However, given the likely scale of the support needed over future weeks, it was important to formalise this and establish robust systems to ensure that everyone in Hawkhurst can access the support they require.

Hence, HCSG was established.

HCSG

HCSG comprises three groups:

- a) body of Volunteers supported by
- b) Central Co-ordination Group,
- c) Reference Group.

The Reference Group, a body of senior stakeholders, chaired by the chairman of Hawkhurst Parish Council, provides oversight.

HCSG is utilising digital technology to the full in order to support the residents of Hawkhurst. Members of the Co-ordination Group have shared access to an online database, which is automatically populated when help is requested or offered through an online form. This form can be accessed from links in our community social media pages and also directly from the HCSG website (www.hawkhurstcommunitysupport.com).

We have a virtual phone number so that we can provide one central number, which is answered between 9am and 9pm, with the option to leave a message outside of that time. WhatsApp, Zoom and, of course, Dropbox have proved to be essential tools.

In addition, our volunteers delivered a flyer to every house in the parish.

In Hawkhurst, we were incredibly fortunate with the offers of help we received. HCSG's operating procedures/plan was written by a resident with experience in emergency planning. Our online system was created for us by another resident, a tech specialist.

HCSG's Co-ordination Group consists of the following roles: Operation Manager, Volunteer Manager, Client Manager, Policy Manager, Finance Manager and Communications Manager. These volunteers have worked tirelessly over the past week or two to get HCSG up and running.

HCSG is currently providing support in terms of shopping, collecting prescriptions, dog walking, and a phone buddy system is being set up.

The support from the village has been incredible: over 180 residents have offered their help as volunteers. At the time of writing, more than 100 have been reference checked and provided with their volunteer ID badge.

The energy, enthusiasm and creativity of HCSG's Co-ordinating Group has enabled us to get up to speed and adapt really quickly. Despite it only being a week since our flyers first went out, we now have more than 70 households signed up for support.

Our website has become an essential resource for the residents of Hawkhurst at this challenging time. It is far more than just a vehicle to access support or volunteer help. It includes essential information on keeping safe, links to guidance on mental health and wellbeing, information on local shops opening times and delivery services, as well as links to other support groups in neighbouring areas.

Local businesses have been doing their bit too. Our volunteers are able to shop in both Tesco and Waitrose during the special opening hours for vulnerable residents. The Store Managers of both stores are also on our reference group, supporting us in getting food and supplies to vulnerable residents. Our village butcher, Park Farm Butchers, has generously offered the use of their van for deliveries. This week, a local farm, Stevens Farm, provided us with a bag of apples for every single household that we are supporting.

The Reference Group had its first meeting on Thursday 2nd April, which was extremely valuable. A common concern shared by the representatives from the Parish Council, HCSG, the medical practice and the supermarkets was the number of elderly and vulnerable people who are still out and about in the village, putting themselves at unnecessary risk.

A joint effort has been introduced to tackle this. HCSG created a new design for flyers and posters specifically aimed at vulnerable residents (see attached). By the end of Friday, A1 posters were on display in the supermarkets, the pharmacy and the medical practice. The pharmacy and medical practice are distributing the flyers with prescriptions. Supermarket staff are handing the flyers out to their vulnerable customers.

Hawkhurst Parish Council direct support.

On the 24th March 2020 The Proper Officer under agreed S101 delegated powers in Consultation with the Chairman and Vice Chairman set aside up to £7,000 of financial support for HCSG. This comprises the budget for the Parish Election and Cllr Expenses for 2020/21.

This is covering costs such as printing of leaflets, posters, flyers and the central phone number. In addition, they are working under the auspices of Hawkhurst Parish Council and they are covered by our Insurance.

This support pales into insignificance when compared to the resources and time of the volunteers but gives the group confidence and reassurance.

HCSG contact details

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