



Weekly News Bulletin for Community and Voluntary Groups, Town and Parish Councils, Partners and Hub Update Subscribers

Updates from the Community Support Hub



NHS Covid-19 app – Locally there has been a significant increase of Covid-19 infections, with 100 new cases in the past fortnight in our District. Therefore, now more than ever we all need to play our part in protecting ourselves, and loved ones.

Please download and use the [NHS COVID-19 app](#) if you haven't already done so to keep people safe and West Berkshire open. You now need to use the app's QR code to check into businesses and venues. However, if your app isn't compatible with your smartphone, or if you don't have a smartphone, you will need to sign in manually.

(Further information about this app is contained in the previous Hub Bulletin Issues 23 and 24.)

Local Engagement Board Meeting (Public) Friday, 20 October 10.00 am – The meeting will provide an update on the Covid-19 situation in West Berkshire. For further event details visit the [attendance page](#). The draft minutes from the previous meeting held on 25 September can be viewed [here](#).

Application form for the £500 Test and Trace Support Payment Scheme now available – People on lower incomes who are required to self isolate and have lost income as a result because they cannot work from home will be eligible for a £500 Test and Trace Support Payment. West Berkshire Council has posted the application process and eligibility criteria on its website here: <https://citizen.westberks.gov.uk/testandtracesupport>



Those without online access can call West Berkshire Customer Service on tel. 01635 551111. Applications will start to be processed from 12 October 2020. People who started to self-isolate from 28 September 2020 can get backdated payments. The scheme will run until 31 January 2021.



“Let's all play our part for West Berkshire” Outdoor Campaign - We have produced vinyl banners to remind residents and visitors of the vital measures everyone needs to take to stop the spread of the coronavirus. These banners are now in the process of being displayed across the district by both our highways team and local town and parish councils. The idea for the banners came out of a recent conversation with a few town and parish councillors and community leaders on ways we can provide support for your local efforts. *Pictured: Banner outside Brimpton Village Hall.*

Newbury Michaelmas Fair 2020 cancellation - We regret to announce that the Newbury Michaelmas Fair will not be going ahead next week due to Covid-19 transmission risks. We are sorry for any disappointment caused, but with infections on the rise nationally, it's important that we do everything we can to protect public health and safety and save lives.

Hub Bulletin frequency change – with the reduction in the number of calls coming into the Community Hub, we are changing the Hub bulletin frequency from weekly to fortnightly. The next edition of the Hub Bulletin will be issued October 23rd. We'll keep you informed of any urgent information in between publication dates.

And finally... The Community Support Hub was honoured to be a speaker at this week's Community Group Roundtable event organised by the High Sheriff of Berkshire, Mary Riall. We were able to highlight the fantastic work of community groups across West Berkshire and share examples of how local groups are adapting so that they can continue to support their neighbours in the future. We were delighted to facilitate the appearance of two lovely West Berkshire residents in a short film at the event, in which they described how Hub staff had made a difference to them by delivering essential supplies and providing a garden makeover.



Government's Latest News and Guidance on Covid-19



Self-isolation requirement now a law - It is now a legal requirement to self-isolate if you test positive for Covid-19 or if you are identified as a contact and told to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace. Failure to self-isolate for the full time-period can result in a fine, starting from £1,000. [More info](#).

Meeting with others safely (social distancing) – This guidance has been updated to include: “When seeing friends and family you do not live with you should meet in groups of 6 or less. In England, this limit of 6 includes children of any age.” See updated [Guidance](#)

Testing programme feedback survey - The Department of Health and Social Care has launched a survey to better understand recent experience with the testing programme and, where appropriate, ordering additional testing kits. Go to [Survey](#) (closes 25 October).

Updates from NHS

Don't put off getting your flu jab! Free vaccine for eligible groups

With Covid-19 in circulation, it's more important than ever that those with a long term health condition are vaccinated in order to protect them from flu. You can have flu without any symptoms and pass it on to family, friends and people you support, many of whom may be at increased risk from flu. If you're at higher risk from coronavirus, you're also more at risk of problems from flu.

It is also important to note that this year, people who live someone who is at high risk from coronavirus (on the NHS shielded patient list) are also eligible for a FREE flu jab on the NHS. If you are on the NHS Shielded Patient List you should have already received correspondence from your GP Surgery regarding booking your free flu vaccine. Otherwise, in order to book your free flu vaccine, please speak to your local GP/Pharmacy and state you are eligible for a free flu vaccine. The list of who is eligible for the FREE flu vaccine is on the NHS website [here](#).



The flu virus kills thousands every year. The flu vaccine is the best protection for you and those around you.

JUST GET YOUR FREE FLU JAB
Ask your pharmacist or GP if you're eligible.

Flu vaccine help us help you

Please note that currently there are issues with vaccine supply nationally and some pharmacies are prioritising certain NHS eligible groups first, such as those who are over 65. Therefore, it may be quicker for you to book your flu vaccine appointment via your GP.

Don't put it off. Protect yourself, protect your family, and protect those you care for.

NHS Royal Berkshire Hospital is urging people to keep hospital appointments. Four films in [Nepalese](#), [Polish](#), [Portuguese](#) and [Swahili](#) have been made by hospital staff. Further languages including English, Arabic and Punjabi will be posted over the next few weeks. The films outline the measures being taken to keep people safe and looked after when they come into hospital. These include new, one-way walking systems, face masks, social distancing in waiting areas and in-depth cleaning of clinical areas between patient appointments.

Winter Wellbeing Information Leaflet – NHS Berkshire West has published a handy set of information about GP visits, looking after your mental health, and who to contact if you are feeling unwell [HERE](#).

Hermitage Food Exchange provides vital support to local residents in need



Introduction

The Hermitage Support Group is a dedicated team of volunteers (130+) set up by Andy Murray, Jon Turner and Carolyn Purchase to help the community manage the challenge of Covid-19. The Support Group have been assisting with many tasks including shopping, prescriptions collection, a friendly chat and making face coverings. In addition, a number of the volunteers carried out fundraising activities and have set up a bustling Food Exchange to support those in need.

Carolyn Purchase is a member of the Hermitage Parish Council and Jon Turner is a commissioned officer in the RAF. Andy Murray is a governor at the village primary school and also a serving warrant officer in the British Army.

We are pleased to share this interview with Andy Murray about the Hermitage Food Exchange's wonderful support to the community since the onset of Covid-19.

Interview

Andy, how did the idea for setting up the Hermitage Food Exchange come about?

Forming the Hermitage Food Exchange was a natural progression from setting up the volunteer group (Hermitage Support Group) and raising monetary donations for a Covid hardship fund. The Hermitage Support Group thought it would be valuable to set up a food bank to support local residents in need, including the vulnerable, people isolating at home, and those who lost their jobs or went into long-term furlough.

The Exchange provides a non means tested service and people can contact us directly if they have a need for food for a period of time.

How did you start up the Food Exchange?

We opened the Food Exchange in June, starting with local donations of food and household essentials that could be assembled into parcels. We also used a contribution from the hardship fund to purchase fresh items. In addition, the Spotlight UK charity gave us an initial stock to us to help us get going and is also kindly still delivering bulk items to us.

Please can you describe for our readers how the Food Exchange operations work?

Members of the community can drop off donated goods or supplies for the Food Exchange every Wednesday afternoon at our base in the Hermitage Village Hall. We receive local donations from residents in Hermitage, Compton, Streatley, Goring and Hampstead Norreys.

The Food Exchange team has 15 volunteers on a rota, and 4 or 5 volunteers come in each week on Wednesdays. They unpack all the food items donated the previous week and put them into stock for a week as a quarantine measure.

Next the volunteers proceed with creating food parcels from the stock ready to be used. They add in fresh ingredients and frozen meats paid for by the hardship fund so that families have the flexibility of making meals they like. Fisher of Newbury has also been providing us fresh fruit and vegetables from their stock of high quality items close to sell by date, which has been highly appreciated. In addition we were delighted to receive an enormous supply of free range eggs from Beechwood Eggs.

One of the volunteers delivers food parcels to local recipients. A different set of volunteers from neighbouring villages come and collect parcels for redistribution in their respective localities. They also drop off food donations from their villages at the Hermitage Food Exchange.

Supported by grants from local businesses including SSE and Newbury Building Society, we've additionally been able to arrange for pre-made ready meals for vulnerable and elderly people in isolation, then frontline workers. These meals have been created by local caterer Jane Staunton, whose cottage pie is a particular favourite!

What items do you need in general?

Any tinned food (except baked beans as we have plenty!) or non-perishable items such as pasta, rice or other standard larder fare. Gluten-free and allergy-friendly items are always welcomed, as are household cleaning supplies. Coming into holidays such as Dilwali and Christmas, tinned biscuits, chocolates and treats for the kids would be also be useful to help families celebrate.

What advice would you give to a group wanting to set up a food exchange for their area?

At the outset, find a venue willing to provide you space – we have been very lucky to be able to use the Hermitage Village Hall.

You need to decide how you will allocate your stock so that there is enough to go round. In our case, we're there to provide a helping hand with meals, rather than a full week's worth of food as our supplies wouldn't stretch that far. Our parcels include staple items for breakfast, lunch and dinner that can be used to make a few meals throughout the week. It's nice to provide some variety, including some treats to boost morale.

It's also helpful to have someone manage the volunteer rota so that people can plan their time accordingly and keep track of attendees for test and trace purposes. Our team uses What's App which is a helpful means of communications to keep schedules flexible if people need to change their shift.

Anything else you'd like to share?

My co-leaders Jon, Carolyn and I would like to give huge thank you to everyone who has provided all their amazing support in one way or another for the Hermitage Food Exchange. We couldn't have done this without the ongoing generosity of people from all walks of life and local businesses from the village and surrounding area. There are many, many people who have provided monetary and/or food donations as well as helpful support throughout the lockdown and still to this day.

[cont'd]

Thank you as well to Spotlight UK for their immense assistance. We'd also like to thank the Hermitage Village Committee who provide us with incredible support and the ongoing use of their hall.

Also we'd like to convey our enormous thank you and appreciation to all the wonderful volunteers who have worked very hard at the Food Exchange to organise stocks as well as pack up and/or deliver the food parcels. Their superhero efforts have been tremendous and heart-warming!

Is there someone you would like to nominate to receive a gift from the West Berkshire Community Santa?

This year has been difficult for so many of us but some local people have been particularly impacted by Covid-19. For this reason, West Berkshire Council is in the process of organising a "Community Santa" gift giving project to let those who are struggling know that others are thinking of them. Through the project, which will be formally launched in early November, residents will be able to go to a confidential online platform to select an anonymous person for whom they will then buy a gift.



Before the online platform goes live, we need nominations for people to receive the gifts and volunteers to distribute them. So we're calling on YOU - the very groups who have been supporting your neighbours through this difficult time - to nominate someone in your community who would benefit from a special treat this festive season. Perhaps you know someone who has been self-isolating alone for a long period of time, or someone who has lost a loved-one recently. Maybe you know a family who have been experiencing unemployment as a result of the current situation or someone whose mental health has suffered during lockdown.

Following your nominations, an anonymous description of the nominee (age/gender) will be posted on the Community Santa gift-giving site. Residents will be invited to visit this confidential platform to let us know who they'd like to purchase a gift for, and then drop off the gift they buy at designated collection points.

If you feel someone of any age/gender/faith in your town or village is having a difficult time and deserves a treat, and you are willing to be responsible for distributing the gift purchased by a resident, please email your nominations to communitysanta@westberks.gov.uk and we'll do the rest. Please do NOT include any personal details such as name or address – we only need to know the age and gender (male/female/not specified) of each recipient, and contact details for the group.

If you have any questions, please feel free to email the team at: communitysanta@westberks.gov.uk

Good news stories – please keep them coming in!

We love to feature your good news stories on our social media and [Hub Facebook](#) page and you can find more about the wonderful work of West Berkshire's volunteers on our [Local Heroes](#) website. Please contact us to share your stories and volunteer photos. It's a great way to say a public thank you to your volunteers and your local community.

With our grateful thanks and best wishes, The Hub Team

Please ensure that all queries about any individual cases are directed to the Hub via the general email westberksbct@westberks.gov.uk or by calling 01635 503579. This is to ensure they are dealt with promptly, effectively and in line with guidelines on dealing with vulnerable adults.