

Committee	FULL COUNCIL
Date	13 July 2020
Agenda Item	17

To consider establishing a permanent volunteer service run by HTC

Here at Halstead Town Council, we have been able to start up an emergency service to provide assistance to the local community. There was nothing in place on 20/03/20 but there was a clear need, as the Council started to receive phone calls from elderly and vulnerable residents, who were either shielding themselves, living with someone who was shielding, or had underlying health issues. The Council immediately put contact details on the website and in the local newspaper. Within a week or so, there was a total of 40 volunteers, and 85 local residents who requested help with collection of medication, shopping, renewal of Blue Badges, contacting the doctor. This group of volunteers was registered as Halstead Town Council Community Volunteers with the Essex Welfare Service, in order to give the group official recognition. This allowed us to display a badge to confirm our authenticity. Over the last 3 months the Council has received referrals from a wide range of agencies – Community 360, Braintree District Council, Essex Welfare service and the local surgery. The volunteers, after being matched with the person in need, have mostly made a permanent arrangement to do their shopping/collect their medication on a regular basis. Payment has been arranged between the 2 individuals in each case, either cash, cheque or through online banking where possible. The area covered has been Halstead only, to avoid volunteers having to travel far and incur expense, although some have been prepared to make journeys to Gosfield and Sible Hedingham. The majority of the requests are for prescriptions to be collected from one of the 3 pharmacies in Halstead, but some people have also had a weekly shop done by their volunteer.

This has been a rewarding and very much needed exercise for all those involved. The relief and reassurance experienced by the vulnerable can be heard during their phone call for help. We were told also by some in need that contact had been made with other agencies at a higher level of local government, but no assistance had yet been forthcoming. It is possible to manage such services very efficiently at local level. Halstead Town Council is currently considering a plan to continue with this service, which provides assistance which other services cannot provide, on a permanent basis and at a local level.

It has become clear to those running the service that volunteers are providing not only a lifeline for emergency supplies and medication, but also important contact, opportunity to have a conversation, and to discuss other matters which may be on someone's mind. Those in need have come to confide in their regular volunteer, and on occasion revealed serious health matters which have not yet been reported to a GP, and this has allowed volunteers to request medical help, for example.

The Town Clerk recently got in touch with all the volunteers, to say thank you, to suggest that we might all have coffee together some time, and to put forward the idea that there is a

need for such a volunteer service in Halstead in normal times too – the vulnerable remain vulnerable even without the threat of Covid 19. She also contacted a considerable number of those who had been helped. Everyone contacted on both sides stated that they would like the service to continue, and that it had been a great help, and had resulted in friendships for some.

Proposal

The current volunteer service appears to be able to provide assistance to those who will remain vulnerable after the threat from the virus has lessened. This service was set up so rapidly to meet an immediate need, that we were not able to do any safeguarding of any kind on the volunteers, but to rely on instinct in trusting them. However, if this service is to continue, a DBS check should be done on all those who decide to continue. Current fee is £23 although it appears that this is free for volunteers. About half the volunteers already have a DBS check.

Recommendation: that HTC agrees to the Halstead Town Council Community Volunteers becoming a permanent voluntary group and pays for a DBS check for anyone who does not already have one.



Sarah Greateorex

Town Clerk