



Social Action Partnership – Update Briefing 14/4/20

The new Cheshire East Social Action Partnership was launched just over a week ago on 1st April 2020.

This included a new website <https://www.cesap.org.uk/> which provides initial information about the Social Action Partnership and the work we will undertake in developing a strong local social impact culture in Cheshire East, underpinned by a thriving Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) sector.

The website also includes information about our planned services, including:

- Development of a new Social Action Charter to help bring the VCFSE sector together with a range of public sector organisations to achieve the outcomes set out within the Cheshire East Five Year Plan.
- Our role in developing effective strategic engagement of the VCFSE sector within Cheshire East structures and partnerships.
- How we can support communities to undertake social action and how we can help harness the range of local assets that exist in local communities.
- The range of support on offer, from assisting with the development, quality and sustainability of VCFSE sector organisations; through to working with business and industry to maximise social value opportunities; to our support with volunteers and helping to co-ordinate volunteer activity.

The Social Action Partnership has of course launched at a very difficult time in the midst of the current Covid-19 situation, and our immediate work programme has involved our direct engagement with Cheshire East Council Commissioners and local partners, including with the VCFSE sector, in the People Helping People response for those in need and offering their support as volunteers.

We have immersed very quickly into these developments, establishing extremely positive and close working relationships from the off, and have been working with colleagues in commissioning and the communities team to assist in developing the infrastructure and capacity needed to match volunteers to those in need of help, including the most vulnerable.

This has enabled the Social Action Partnership to take a lead role with the Cheshire East Communities Team alongside the Community Development officers in the initial establishment of a virtual network of People Helping People Community Response Volunteer Coordination Points across the 8 Cheshire East Care Communities areas.

The aim of the Community Response Volunteer Coordination Points is to offer support to individuals and families who may be impacted upon by Covid-19. There are a number of challenges to this with many informal groups having set up, with very well meaning offers of support, but there are also risks that come with this, for example potential spread of the virus,

people who may take advantage of the situation and scams, and practical issues such as handling cash. The Community Response Volunteer Coordination Points will help in providing a solution to this. Volunteer Coordination Points will be able to provide a single point of contact through which to channel support, advice and communication. Guidelines will enable safety and safeguarding, protecting individuals and volunteers, and with good systems in place will help ensure no one is missed or forgotten and that support can be effectively and fairly co-ordinated.

Volunteer Coordination Points will be able to offer the following core provision:

- Able to link with food banks in their area or other food provision and distribution for those in need
- Act as a volunteer hub for those who have offered their support to be linked to local need
- Volunteers who can offer advice and guidance, shop for essentials for vulnerable and self-isolating individuals, and conduct wellbeing phone calls

Our support has also included the development of a Volunteer Coordination Points Guidance Pack which contains a range of information that either an organisation that is delivering an existing community response might need to assist them with this, or in areas where there is a gap, for an organisation or group to be identified and supported to get established. The pack includes practical information such as the role and operation of a Community Response Volunteer Coordination Point; guidance for becoming a Community Response Local Volunteer; Fact Sheets to assist volunteers, for example relating to shopping, collecting prescriptions, driving, making wellbeing calls, and relating to payments; a letter that volunteers can use to evidence their role which has been endorsed by the Police, and a number of policy templates with support from CVS Cheshire East such as for safeguarding that hubs are able to adopt together with information on how to deliver support safely and where to signpost for further support for an individual that is in need.

Work is now in progress to help establish Volunteer Coordination Points with local organisations, including Town Council's and VCFSE organisations, in each Care Community area so that volunteers can be quickly, effectively and safely referred into these from the People Helping People enquiries database. Each Volunteer Coordination Point is also developing a series of spokes into other local support available in communities, for example with local food banks, for neighbourly assistance, or access to advice such as supporting mental health.

Whilst this urgent work is being progressed, the Social Action Partnership is continuing to mobilise its services, including actions to raise its profile over the coming weeks and to build relationships. We are grateful for the support of our Cheshire East Council colleagues and range of partners and will provide further updates to follow.

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