



Mersea's Community Response to Covid-19

A week before the Government announced the lockdown measures West Mersea Town Council attended a meeting on the 16th March arranged by the Free Church on Mersea at which it was agreed that the Council would coordinate a joint approach in supporting the vulnerable and those self-isolating during the Covid-19 crisis.

By the 20th March a number of measures were in place – these included finding upwards of 150 volunteers, setting up a dedicated help-line, designing and printing 4000 cards announcing the help-line and a further 2000 follow-up cards for the volunteers, setting up two Facebook pages and agreeing all the necessary protocols and initial financing. Come the 23rd March all households on Mersea had received the initial card announcing the helpline.

The calls coming into the helpline are entered onto a database which is used to coordinate our network of volunteers and local coordinators. By the 8th April the helpline had received in excess of 400 calls with the total at the end of April having exceeded 1000. Our wonderful volunteers are working tirelessly at collecting and delivering prescriptions, delivering essential food and other necessities, even collecting pensions with the cooperation of the local Post Office, and generally providing a level of support and assistance for those living alone or self-isolating.

Many organisations on Mersea have been providing essential services at this most difficult of times and the public's response has been overwhelmingly supportive. Sincere thanks are also due to outside agencies and in particular Essex County Council, Councillors and officials; Colchester Borough Council; Essex Outdoors Mersea; East of England Cooperative Society and our local MP Sir Bernard Jenkin.

Two initiatives set up by West Mersea Town Council would not have been possible without the enthusiastic assistance of these agencies. Firstly, Essex County Council and Essex Outdoors Mersea management and chefs working with our volunteers have set up a Meals on Wheels service for Mersea and nearby villages, delivering a hot lunch 7 days a week to all those who may need it. There is a small cost but all residents should feel free to use this service. Secondly, agreement was reached with the East of England Cooperative Society to provide a Community Account for those of our volunteers purchasing food stuffs and other essentials on behalf of those self-isolating or those finding it difficult to get out and about.

To help support our volunteers with out-of-pocket expenses, provide ID cards, PPE materials and support those in particular hardship a Community Fund was set-up and within days donations had exceeded all expectations. Any funds left when the pandemic has passed, and a degree of normality returns, will be distributed to local charities.

All this has been happening concurrent with the Council ensuring that, through virtual meetings and changes in working practices of its small team of employees, that as far as the current restrictions allow, the Council has been able to conduct its 'normal business'. Whilst the council offices are currently closed, we can still be contacted on 01206 382128.

Councillors would like to thank all those who have so generously given their time to this endeavour and also to our staff in manning the helpline and providing "service as usual". The way our wonderful community has responded to this crisis has received commendations from both local and national government.

If you need help, can assist as a volunteer or would like to make a donation to the community fund, please use the helpline number: **01206 489240**. For a host of other useful information surrounding Covid-19 please access www.westmersea.org/COVID-19