

# Implementing front line response to Covid

## *A Local Authority view*



**Rachel Doe** Project Manager (BCP Council)

### **BACKGROUND**

Local Authorities are not always known for their ability to act at speed, mainly due to the processes required to ensure transparency in everything we do. Although always having to be accountable, the pandemic required swift action to protect the most vulnerable members of society and help those most seriously affected – this was time-sensitive to the maximum degree. The challenge was initially how to identify those individuals who were most at risk (particularly those who may not be immediately obvious through other processes), triage those approaching the Council for help and determine what levels of assistance were available. This undertaking by a dedicated and upskilled project team of officers from across the Council, many seconded from totally unrelated roles, led to the Together We Can programme.



**#TogetherWeCan**



### **WHAT IS THE INNOVATION**

Together We Can (TWC) is an innovation pathway led by BCP Council, working in close partnership with public, private and voluntary sector organisations as well as community groups and residents who have offered to help and support to the vulnerable people in the conurbation during the pandemic.

- Protects the area's most vulnerable residents
- Supports those who have identified themselves as being in food crisis during the pandemic
- Helps vulnerable people (individuals or households) who are isolating and who are without family or friends nearby
- Provides advice for those who are self-isolating but who have support networks or who are well but worried

To manage the volumes of calls to a newly established TWC helpline a software-based solution was quickly put in place, adapting a Microsoft Dynamics package already used within the Council and generating a triage system. A standard set of questions were asked to shielding residents contacted by the team, in addition to the standard Government survey questions. Residents proactively contacting the TWC helpline were also asked these questions and the answers assigned them a bronze, silver, gold or platinum priority status. The system was rolled out within a matter of days after lockdown commenced and provided the foundation of the TWC programme.



## ADOPTION JOURNEY

A key notification the Council received from Government at the beginning of lockdown was the distribution of emergency food provisions to centralised locations. The TWC project team identified a suitable muster point for deliveries located in Littledown Leisure Centre and defined a mechanism for the distribution. The challenges faced at this point were primarily of a logistical nature and required identifying a delivery fleet of vehicles and drivers, redeploying staff from other roles so drivers weren't operating alone, setting out a basic "picking line" and obtaining items such as trolleys and carrier bags for pickers to use. The first supplies came in dribs and drabs, making it difficult to achieve an effective supply line, and to manage the supplies – for example finding enough fridges for fresh milk when it was delivered after the drivers had left for the day!



*Co-ordination of food parcel delivery at Littledown Leisure Centre*



*BCP Council staff manned the helpline both at the office and remotely from home*

In order to help identify the residents who were most at risk local authorities were able to access a database of the most vulnerable shielding individuals. These people were contacted each time the database was refreshed and their circumstances assessed to understand if they had means of getting essential supplies. At this stage home deliveries of shopping were not commonplace through small local suppliers and the main online supermarket systems were being overrun - assuming that these shielding people were digitally enabled and internet savvy enough to place orders online anyway.

However we were conscious that there would be others outside this shielding database who were also vulnerable at this point in time. These people were contacting the TWC helpline independently or became visible through others contacting TWC on behalf of their relatives or neighbours. These people were contacted by those working in TWC, and assigned a priority status on the system to ensure they received help appropriately.



## HOW HAS IT SCALED

Very swiftly the TWC programme gained momentum. As restaurants had closed down, a significant contribution of food which could not be used came from local leisure organisation BH Live, who also supported the distribution hub at Littledown.

The momentum gained by positive social media comments and Council-led campaigns resulted in thousands of volunteers stepping forward to help.



These volunteers were matched by the TWC team with a vulnerable or shielding person in their community to assist with shopping, collecting prescriptions, or just to chat on the phone.

*BH Live volunteers (Head of Hospitality David Christie and Group Executive Head Chef Stewart Parker, with Chris Hope from BCP Council collecting the donation from the BIC.*



As the project progressed and schemes such as government food packages ceased the work done by the volunteers was essential in enabling vulnerable residents to get basic supplies. These were often elderly people who couldn't always take advantage of the wealth of delivery options then becoming available to those with internet access.



## WHAT WERE THE ENABLERS

Although the Dynamics package was an early milestone in the project, the main enablers were the people involved. This innovation was a combination of software and people power – working together to deliver life-saving results.

The willingness of staff, who had no experience working in a social care setting, to spend evenings and weekends manning the TWC helpline, taking calls and calling back those who needed additional help was key to the success of the project.



## KEY CHALLENGES & LEARNING

A “can do” attitude was vital in this project – understanding the scope of what was needed and running with it until the problem was solved was vital to the success of TWC in the early days. At a time when we were all challenged in our personal circumstances and facing a great deal of change, Council staff stepped up to the plate, quickly undertook basic training essentials and embraced the new challenges being thrown at them on an hourly basis. While NHS key workers were engaged in the front-line fight against Covid, projects like TWC helped keep residents safe and out of the firing line as much as possible. Rolling out software and managing logistics comes with its own set of technical challenges, but the primary learning from the TWC project implementation was understanding how having the right people onboard makes a project successful.



## NEXT STEPS....

The programme continues to play an important part in the community brand and fronts a number of activities. TWC has already become integrated into business as usual, albeit with some adjustments as Council staff and volunteers were drawn back into their day jobs.

The helpline is currently dormant but the Council’s general enquiries line has replaced it during standard contact hours. Some volunteers continue to maintain contact with those they helped during lockdown. As part of the Local Outbreak Management Plan (LOMP), a communications and engagement strategy has been developed with an emphasis on pandemic readiness and a dedicated TWC Project Manager was appointed to help with the integration into BAU, including taking on the management of shielding food parcels and the redistribution of unwanted parcels to others.

TWC has also facilitated a Telephone Friendship Group to help tackle isolation and loneliness in conjunction with other local organisations.

TWC is ready to relaunch if needed.



## WHAT WAS THE IMPACT

In the first year:

- 400 BCP Council staff were redeployed into the TWC programme
- TWC helpline was manned 8am – 8pm 7 days a week in the initial and subsequent lockdowns
- 20,000 calls were made to the TWC helpline in the first year
- 5,000 residents had support from a volunteer
- 15,000 shielded residents were checked on
- Local businesses interactive map developed for food deliveries
- Over 15,000 emails were received and responded to
- Regular email updates went out to over 35,000 residents

The Council acknowledges the need to continue supporting residents as “our new normal” is established.

*“Never in my life have I received this much help and if I was the King, I would have made you all Knights and Dames”*

Isolated shielded resident pro-actively contacted through TWC



## REFERENCES/

BCP Council website:

<https://www.bcpCouncil.gov.uk/News/News-Features/COVID-19/Support-your-community/Support-your-community.aspx>

BCP Council Youtube channel:


<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3fJDxFXig4k>


Agenda item, Overview and Scrutiny Committee Covid 19 Recovery - Community and People Council Response


<https://democracy.bcpCouncil.gov.uk/mgAi.aspx?ID=4736>



## CONTACT DETAILS

 [dorsetinnovationhub@uhd.nhs.uk](mailto:dorsetinnovationhub@uhd.nhs.uk)

 0300 019 8125

 <https://ourdorset.org.uk/innovation/>

*Socially distanced food parcel organisation at Littledown Leisure Centre with staff from BCP Council and BH Live*

