

THREE RIVERS DISTRICT COUNCIL

At an Extraordinary meeting of the **Local Strategic Partnership Board** held via 8X8 Virtual Office on Tuesday 12 May 2020 from 10.30am to 11.58am

Participants:	Cllr Sara Bedford (SB)	Leader of Three Rivers District Council
	Tim Anfilogoff (TA)	NHS Herts Valleys CCG
	Tina Barnard (TB)	Watford Community Housing
	Shivani Davé (SD)	Three Rivers District Council
	Emma Doree (ED)	West Herts College
	Nicky Fawcett (NF)	Watford & Three Rivers Trust
	Saffron Johnson (SJ)	Watford & West Herts Chamber of Commerce
	Chris Luff (CL)	Watford & West Herts Chamber of Commerce
	Elsbeth Mackenzie (EM)	Chief Executive, Thrive Homes
	Peta Mettam (PM)	Citizens Advice Service in Three Rivers
	Sara Miles (SM)	Office of the PCC
	Jim Moran (JM)	Herts Fire and Rescue
	Roger Seabourne (RS)	District Councillor, TRDC
	Andy Stovold (AST)	Head of Community Partnerships, TRDC
	Adam Such (ASU)	Hertfordshire ConstabularyPolice, The
	Christine Wyard (CW)	Ascend
	Rebecca Young (RY)	Strategic Policy & Partnerships Manager, TRDC
	Mike Simpson	Three Rivers District Council

Apologies for absence were received from Mark Mills-Bishop

LSP 16/19 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chairman asked meeting participants to introduce themselves.

LSP 17/19 STRATEGY COMMUNITY COVID-19 IMPACT ASSESSMENT

AST said the purpose of this extraordinary meeting was to discuss the impact of the current emergency and engage with partners in terms of providing a shared understanding of the challenges that it presented.

He introduced the draft Community Strategy Covid-19 Impact Assessment and invited an exchange of ideas with a view to both short term and medium/long term recovery planning.

Members of the Board were asked to provide an update of how the coronavirus pandemic affected their agency, and what the partnership can do by way of response.

Watford Community Housing

TB said a key message was the restarting of construction work following the Government's relaxing of some lockdown rules, although there was much confusion among tenants due to the ambiguity of the announcement. She said that some WCH sites had never closed, and those that had were starting to open.

Discussions amongst the teams at WCH centred largely on repairs to properties, and what could be done in tenants' homes. There was a significant increase in arrears for individuals claiming Universal Credit (UC), many of them with no experience of the

system, being self-employed or furloughed, and for this reason the partnership had set up a welfare fund to provide help, not necessarily with rent but for buying white goods.

The provision of Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) had not been a problem for the service as it was doing void work, and WCH had not furloughed any staff.

EM said Thrive had closed some sites but were now back at work, but delivery will be delayed due to ensuring safe working practices are followed. Thrive had also seen an increase in numbers of UC claims but no arrears at this time as many claimants were doing so for the first time. Thrive had continued to do emergency repair work and fire risk assessments as well as gas and safety work.

EM said plans were in place to address the rise in arrears that would follow, and that a big challenge was those tenants who were self-isolating and not letting staff into the properties.

RS referenced the current block on moving people in temporary accommodation to permanent, and the presumed block on people joining the waiting list for temporary accommodation, and asked if it was possible to use dwellings currently standing empty to temporarily house clients. He thought it was a missed opportunity and would like to have a conversation with housing providers on this subject.

EM said Grove Court in Croyley was a particular issue for Thrive as it was one of its properties, and the sensitivity of the client group occupying it meant housing homeless individuals there wasn't an option. When a property became empty, the process would begin to build new homes. EM said she would be happy to discuss this matter. She added that Thrive continued to let properties during the present crisis, but that ASB issues in some properties would put homeless people at too much risk, and therefore could not be considered.

WCH was closing a scheme at Northcotts in Abbots Langley and TB said decanting of clients was on hold because of the circumstances, and that there were valid reasons for not using such properties.

AST said the UC situation and rent arrears would clearly be a big challenge in the near future, and invited PM to update the group from a CASTR perspective. PM said clients had seen UC payments start again, and trends were now changing in that the eight full time paid caseworkers were busy, while most of the 16 volunteers had little or no work. Last week, albeit a four day week, the service had 142 client contacts versus 244 for the same time last year, but casework would increase and an immediate challenge would be to get the volunteer staff either returning to work or doing so remotely to answer the calls.

Initially, enquiries into the service were mostly UC related but were now more benefits and tax credit oriented. The agency was predominantly a face-to face facility, and calls to the office has dropped considerably during the pandemic, and CASTR had surveyed its staff to determine who could return to work or work from home in order to maintain delivery of service. PM added that an increase in evictions was also expected in the near future.

Issues had also been experienced with the non-delivery of post during the emergency, which impacted tribunal decisions that were time-sensitive and credit notices going out late.

CW said Ascend was expecting to be inundated with requests for help with rent arrears, debt and UC issues. She was aware of partners to refer onto, but questioned how the voluntary sector could be supported to deal with this, and said she fully expected many new customers coming through the doors.

AST asked whether there might be technological ways to help services, such as a video link facility in the office. PM said that would definitely help with client access, and CW said using technology to put clients in touch with CASTR would be beneficial.

AST suggested the use of currently under-occupied premises such as Three Rivers House and Parish Council offices in which to create informational help hubs.

TA said the CCG had a small grants pot available that they'd look to spend on coming out of the present emergency, and could potentially co-ordinate the effort on a locality basis. HCC has sent out a survey to determine specific areas of need. TA mentioned the good work done by LINK workers who were reaching out to vulnerable patients and said consideration was needed as to where best to develop networks. He said the CCG was working closer with District now which was an exciting prospect, and on the point of technology, NHS England had some suspended personalisation money to invest in Covid-related projects, and there existed the potential to get more tablets and training in order to help people who are isolated. AST said people will be self-isolating for a long time yet and provision of tablets would be very helpful. He wished to put on record his recognition of the good work done by LINK workers and community navigators, and definitely wouldn't want that joined-up working to stop.

ACTION: That TA and AST to have a conversation outside the meeting to take the matter further.

CL said the Chamber of Commerce detected uncertainty within the local business area, particularly daily changes in furlough regulations. Advice being given to customers is to keep an eye on the government website, but regular updates are being held with professional partners, and accountancy practices and the like are providing professional advice on what to do next.

The Chamber was focusing on keeping people mentally fit, and providing volunteering sessions for members to enable them to remain active. Zoom meetings or similar were being held for the sector to keep everyone informed and involved.

SJ said everything was now virtual, having been face to face, and the Chamber was using technology to do the same work as before, and are undertaking work related to furlough and business grants. She is now starting to look at recovery and what the Chamber can do to support clients further down the road.

CL spoke of the Watford Wellness Group, headed up by a chaplain to address a large number of expected mental health issues, and sessions are held every Wednesday. CL said they were very open to collaboration on how to get information to the front line. A challenge is the number of video conferences now being held, and it's a question of how to promote an event effectively to 5,000-6,000 clients on their database.

SB said she had been contacted by constituents who have small businesses using serviced offices but do not have a grant as they are not NNDR payees. TRDC is exploring a common scheme to address this group but the budget is limited, and contrary to commonly held opinions, the Council did not have millions to give away in grants.

CL said that's the message that the Chamber of Commerce is communicating, and there is also a risk of fraud in this area so businesses are advised to do what they can and not focus on what they can't do.

AST referred to education and asked if anyone had comments on the subject. ED said West Herts College, along with other schools, was doing work to support vulnerable groups, and free school meals for those entitled were paid for. Each school with free

meals students was responding unilaterally due to the lack of an overseeing body. Support has been provided to allow students access to IT equipment and the internet. When it had been necessary for WHC to close its premises students were supported from home. Primary and secondary have similar issues, and dongles were provided to enable access to the internet, which supported 500 students.

SB raised concerns that if schools were only partly open, parents' employment would be adversely impacted if grandparents were self-isolating or shielding. Additionally, many pupils in compulsory education (aged 5-16) were not getting the (IT or Wifi) support to study online. This situation was most likely to affect those from lower income groups, and disadvantage them even further. AST said this was perhaps something to raise at a meeting of the Families First group, with a view to establishing a centralised fund from which resources could be made available.

Independence and Resilience

CW said Ascend had done some amazing work throughout lockdown and was keeping in regular contact with 50-60 people. Ascend was now looking at recovery and help people move on post-lockdown. Acquiring and loaning out tablets etc. would be a good start.

NF said many voluntary groups were not currently operating, and it was likely 25% or more would not re-open. She said some clients cannot get to services because they were not delivering directly, so how best to signpost people needed to be communicated.

W3RT was working with Covid groups directly, and the challenge was to identify the emerging needs. Those volunteer groups that were operating have not taken on any new volunteers, and some have worked extra hours, although this is a short-term fix as hours will have to be reduced, and the risk of 'volunteer fatigue' is an issue.

Volunteers have come forward through local councils, and 1,500 are available although not all have been matched. The matching of volunteers is an area for improvement, and W3RT can promote volunteering opportunities on its website and mailshot people.

There have been over 8,000 Good Samaritan volunteers registered in Hertfordshire, most of whom have not been engaged. W3RT hopes to acquire this data, and it is possible there might be duplication but a concern is losing them.

A Community Fund is available, and W3RT asked that agencies help to promote it.

SB wished to record her appreciation for the good work achieved by W3RT, especially Ali (May).

Safety

ASU said crime and ASB in Three Rivers has been very different from previous years. Although crime levels have not changed much, numbers have increased in Domestic Abuse, often involving new offenders who have been locked down in close proximity to non-intimate family members, parents or partners. DA ranges from damage to assaults to violence with or without injury.

The need is for the Police to manage the situation as best as they can. ASU said there has been great ASB partnership working, and disputes amongst neighbour during lockdown has been a big issue. ASU is aware of persistent 'repeat callers' and these behaviours require addressing, with a variety of support needed to reduce demand on the CSP. Potential issues resulting from the current emergency are an increase in Fraud, e.g. offers of 'financial support' doorstep crime and increased online risks for

children. He would be interested to see the demographics of new DA crime, and whether it varies by income areas.

RS said Three Rivers had previously been the best district in Herts for low crime, but its figures are now up, and the other nine Districts in Hertfordshire have decreased. He asked what the reason was for the change. ASU said he would have to review the statistic, but the increase was actually just three cases, although he would have expected this to reduce as well. Violence against the person accounted for a large percentage of the increase, with Domestic Abuse a key contributor.

SB asked if the numbers were up because more victims were reporting crimes. ASU said victims of DA had for years been encouraged to report incidents, and although he hoped greater reporting was a factor, he could not be certain. He said that drug-related offences have all been for possession, which is both positive and negative in that those further up the chain are evading arrest. AST said there was perhaps less tolerance to criminal behaviour in Three Rivers so people may be more inclined to address complaints to agencies and therefore provide support to victims and witnesses.

SB said social media posts suggested residents **were** less tolerant at the present time and therefore more inclined to report minor infractions.

ASU said having arrived in Three Rivers at the same time as coronavirus, he's been very impressed with the work of the CSP agencies.

*Health and Wellbeing -
Physical and Mental Health – TRDC.*

AST said the District Council was promoting physical wellbeing along with the national campaigns to encourage the public to stay healthy, and that Herts MIND Network was doing excellent work in promoting Mental Health and engaging those in need of help, although more can be done, and this is being looked at.

Parks and open spaces are to open, as will tennis courts, but some hubs are having to remain closed due to issues with social distancing.

CW said Ascend had kept in touch with clients to encourage physical wellbeing, and had received funding from the CCG for 40 clients to work on a community blanket project which had proved beneficial to many individuals in terms of mental health, and the service was running book clubs to keep individuals engaged. The expectation was that a tsunami of mental health issues would become evident as the lockdown restrictions eased further, and that good weather so far has kept the problem suppressed.

AST said officers' experiences of talking on the telephone to isolated and vulnerable people illustrated that individuals often appreciated just being able to talk to someone, and that this was something that should be discussed at an Adults with Complex Needs meeting, while Families First could look at those instances in which children were involved.

AST said his aim was to circulate this document for other agencies to comment on, and develop an Action Plan with which to move forwards.

LSP 18/19 FUTURE MEETINGS

AST asked the Board whether there was consensus regarding the regularity of future meetings during the Covid-19 threat, and whether to have another interim meeting or

offline dialogue. AST said his feeling was there were sufficient groups and diversity within the CSP to cover the various issues, and it was agreed to collate feedback for early June with a view to bringing back to the Board at its meeting on 23 June.

LSP 19/19 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

CL expressed concern about confidence of returning to work as the post-coronavirus restrictions are lifted further. He said people were unsure of what to do, and that it would be worth creating a document for sharing best practices across agencies that provide direction on returning to work, and which could be updated daily as necessary. He said it would help people gain confidence to cope with social distancing, and knew from personal experience of someone within the film industry who had compiled such a detailed document. Due to his involvement with the Chamber of Commerce, however, he did not think it appropriate to put himself forward for the task.

ACTION: AST said he would take the suggestion forward, and discuss with Environmental Health Commercial and the Director of Public health. CL said he was happy to offer his contacts and resources for this purpose. SB said she would also take the idea to the Herts Leaders group.

DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS:

Tuesday 23 June 2020 at 12.30pm

CHAIRMAN