

COVID-19 Portland Resilience Plan

Introduction

The coronavirus pandemic is possibly one of the greatest crises this country has experienced since the Second World War. It has put a severe strain on the health services, economy and general wellbeing of the nation. There has been widespread anxiety and concern for how the future will unfold.

Response to the crisis has required Gov't resourcing unheard of in peace time. The circumstances demand an effective response that will help the country get through the pandemic. This response will be worked out at a number of different levels: the international, national, regional, local and domestic.

To that end, representatives from key local government and civic institutions have come together to co-ordinate Portland's community-wide response to coronavirus. This plan details the measures, planned and already in place, that are being taken to help Portland "weather the storm" that is upon us.

Scope

This plan is designed to complement other contingency planning. It should be understood to sit alongside and support any plans issued by HM Gov't, Dorset Council, the NHS or any other local Authority.

Inevitably, due to the resources available, the scope of the plan will have limitations. This includes the kind of issues it is able to address, as well as the response. For example, whilst we recognise that economic damage has been and will continue to be a problematic side-effect of the virus, we have to be realistic in our expectations. At this local level, a large-scale financial stimulus package would clearly be unfeasible; however, support of affected individuals via the Foodbank and Island Community Action would be.

Likewise, many areas of action will lie beyond the competence of authorities, groups and individuals at this level. The plan respects this fact: we seek to do what we can, not what we can't. Furthermore, it is not designed to replace good neighbourly care or other informal arrangements between individuals!

Aims

The aim of the plan is simple: to ensure that those on Portland who are most at-risk are supported through the crisis. We do not want anyone to "fall through the net".

The plan aims to co-ordinate local resources to assist those most affected by the crisis. If a response is to be effective, it needs to be done collaboratively. A co-ordinated approach will avoid duplication, streamline communication and decision-making processes, as well as produce confidence that a community response is being competently handled.

Outline

There are now four main strands to the plan with a further one currently in development:

- Support for the elderly and those at risk in our community throughout self-isolation
- Support for those on the breadline
- Mental Health and Wellbeing support
- Effective communication to ensure appropriate information reaches as many as possible
- Planning for the extended consequences of COVID-19 measures [in development]

The details of the implementation will be worked out by the agencies on the ground.

Support for the Elderly and At-Risk Individuals

This group of people- demographically over-represented on Portland- are most vulnerable from the effects of the coronavirus. Self-isolation can present logistical and wellbeing problems for those affected.

To mitigate these effects, a large team of volunteers is being recruited to provide appropriate support. This may include shopping for self-isolating individuals and households, prescription/medication collection, as well as helping with errands such as dog-walking. Furthermore, a network of “befrienders” will operate to reduce social isolation by regular phone calls, emails etc. They will also be able to report back any concerns.

This is being co-ordinated by ICA who will act as a central hub for all “official” volunteering. This will enable adequate safeguarding practices to be in place.

Support for Households on the Breadline

With the economic effects of the coronavirus pandemic, many households may find themselves struggling financially. This may negatively impact their ability to access adequate food supplies.

To ensure that no-one goes hungry, Portland Foodbank are providing food packages (which also contain items such as nappies, sanitary care and other appropriate products). These will be either available for collection, or in the case of households that need to self-isolate, deliveries will be made.

The effectiveness of this measure depends on good local community resourcing, so donations will be repeatedly encouraged in public communication.

Mental Health and Wellbeing Support

Self-isolation and anxiety about the effects of the virus is likely to adversely affect the mental health and wellbeing of a number of individuals. In such circumstances it can be difficult to know to whom to turn, especially for individuals with a limited social network.

To give support for those who need it, a 24hr pastoral care helpline is being set up. It is intended to provide a “listening ear”, as well as a way to “signpost” individuals to additional help where appropriate.

Whilst this is being co-ordinated by Portland churches, the service is non-denominational and open to people of all faiths or no acknowledged faith. Support given will be impartial, confidential and where information is offered, accurate. The helpline will be operated within national safeguarding frameworks and adhere to good practice in this area.

Effective Communication

Access to services and support is dependent on timely, accurate and accessible communication of relevant information. Whilst many Portland residents have access to the internet, some do not. Of particular concern are those who cannot access information regarding appropriate support. To help people receive information about key topics such as Council Tax Support, healthcare, the Foodbank etc. a leaflet has been produced. It is being distributed at various locations such as Co-op shops, and will also be given via ICA's work and Foodbank parcels etc. An online version in PDF will be shared via email, Facebook and other social media platforms. At time of writing, the first version has been published; further channels (such as distribution via Tesco and other venues) are being explored.

Longevity Planning [in development]

At the time of writing, it is likely that "Lockdown" and other social distancing measures will continue for some time. This will mean that there will be continued and possibly increased dependence on support services. In turn, this will require good planning to ensure a sustained response is possible on the part of island community organisations. For example, the Foodbank was originally designed as a "relief" service- support that households could access in particular times of need. However, due to the economic downturn associated with the pandemic, it is likely that the Foodbank will become a food programme- long-term provision of food for households. Furthermore, as time goes on, so will the strain on volunteers and their wellbeing, as well as financial and other resources. We will work to plan so that the local community response is sustainable for as long as the circumstances demand one.

Other Considerations

The four strands of the plan are designed to work alongside each other. Those involved in delivering them will be in communication via the Portland Resilience Committee where joint decisions will be made. As previously described, signposting will take place to ensure that residents can access support and resources most appropriate for their situation. Good communication will be key to the effective implementation of the plan.

The Portland Resilience Committee is responsible for the direction and implementation of this plan. Terms of Reference have been drawn up; it is intended to keep the Committee small in number to streamline decision-making.

The Committee will liaise with higher local authorities (such as Dorset Council) and other bodies, e.g. the Foodbank, as appropriate. It will also ensure good communication with the wider community through a number of media including Facebook, the Free Portland News and possibly email/radio. We will also communicate official Gov't advice, as well as appropriate information, and will encourage responsible behaviour throughout the crisis.

We will co-ordinate with other bodies such as local healthcare to ensure joined-up thinking. Examples of this include signposting to relevant services, ensuring accurate information is promoted to help people access help through the appropriate channels and prescription delivery services.

One recent community suggestion was a traffic light system to highlight those in need. In this scheme, isolated residents could place a red (if they were in need of help) or green (if everything was ok) sticker/card in their windows to indicate their situation to neighbours. Whilst the Committee recognise and value the good intent behind this scheme, our opinion was that to support it would endorse risk to vulnerable residents. Of particular concern were safeguarding and health risks that could be heightened by advertising vulnerability to the general public.

It should be stressed that the plan is reviewed regularly and is evolving as the situation changes.

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