



Subject:	Supporting Vulnerable People COVID-19
Date:	10 November 2020
Reporting Officer:	Ryan Black, Director of Neighbourhood Services
Contact Officer:	Alison Allen, Neighbourhood Services Manager

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this paper is to update Members on the planning, partner engagement and support mechanisms in place to support vulnerable people in a way that is complementary to existing community and voluntary sector delivery.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- note this approach is based on extensive partner engagement (including debrief with strategic community partners) and will be discussed with our community partners for any further feedback- endorse the Frequently Asked Questions at Appendix 2
3.0	Main report
	Background
3.1	Members will be aware of the extensive work by community and voluntary sector partners, Council and other statutory partners as part of the initial COVID-19 wave.

3.2	<p>Members will also be aware though that during that initial wave, there was a strong sense:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- There was potential duplication (particularly in relation to food)- Council (on request from DfC) had stepped in to a space in relation to food delivery and running a helpline which it had not traditionally operated in- That alignment between services a statutory and community/voluntary level could be improved upon- That because of all of the above, we were collectively not always getting to those who most needed the support.
3.3	<p>A debrief with the strategic community partners Council worked with during the initial wave of COVID-19, was held on 13 October 2020 and our strategic community partners supported this position. In particular, they felt that Council should add value by connecting, facilitating and advocating, rather than stepping in to a space we did not traditionally operate in and duplicate existing provision. The summary of their feedback is attached at Appendix 1.</p>
	<p><u>Second Wave Planning</u></p>
3.4	<p>Taking all of this in to account, Officers have worked with partners to work through the processes that would support a more holistic approach to supporting vulnerable people, with the Council enhancing and adding value if there were gaps and when it was needed, rather than duplicating existing services.</p>
3.5	<p>Partners involved in that planning were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Advice NI (Funded by DfC to run the Regional Helpline)- Volunteer Now (supporting the volunteer eco system across the city should it be needed)- Fareshare (Strategic food supply chain partners regionally and funded by DfC to enhance this, provides food supply to community/voluntary organisations working with vulnerable people, rather than individuals)- Red Cross (Welfare, Hardship and Food support regionally as well as logistics support in the form of volunteers/vehicles if needed. On contract to BCC)- Trussell Trust (Citywide Network supporting majority of existing foodbanks in Belfast, also with strategic food supply chain partners)- Belfast Trust (supporting clinically vulnerable individuals, also with a contract with Red Cross in similar areas as Council)

3.6

The outcome of that engagement has supported the feedback from strategic community partners. Additionally, individual planning by these organisations has identified the following (please note this is the position as things stand today and whilst surge planning has taken place, the position is not guaranteed and will need to be reviewed weekly).

- Food supply in Belfast to support food banks and community/voluntary organisations providing food to vulnerable people is not an issue at present and not expected to be for the next 6 months. The supply chain is strong and food banks are reporting to us there are high levels of stock at present
- There is an extensive bank of individuals who volunteered in the first wave who can be called upon to support community/voluntary partners if needed and systems are in place to enhance that if needed
- Financial hardship support is in place from within the existing system (including the DfC COVID-19 discretionary payment for anyone on a low income who has to self-isolate or is ill due to COVID-19 and other benefits). However, there is also fall back financial hardship support provided by Red Cross (on contract to both Belfast Trust and Belfast City Council which will include utilities/fuel) should existing systems not alleviate the immediate pressure for the individual/family.
- The expertise in accessing support to alleviate financial hardship (access to benefits and debt alleviation) lies with local advice providers who are already funded to deliver this work. They continue to provide support as needed and are not identifying unmanageable pressures at present, however, we keep in regular touch with them to ensure early identification of pressures on the system that may need further support.
- There are a number of key inter-dependencies which will determine how significant the expected surge in relation to financial hardship including any job support schemes brought forward by the UK Government/NI Executive and the Universal Credit application waiting times (currently 4-6 weeks). Contacts in DfC have been identified to keep us informed on the Universal Credit waiting times so we can adjust plans with all partners.
- Social and Emotional Support systems are already in place regionally should they be needed, with referral pathways to local service providers if needed and this is also in place for prescriptions.
- Advice NI has undertaken the necessary preparations to ensure their operations can be scaled appropriately in response to demand.
- A formal request has been made to DfC to ensure local authority level reporting can be provided through their contract with Advice NI (rather than regional as is the

	<p>current position) to ensure early warning of issues/pressures in Belfast and to ensure individual/family queries to the helpline are being appropriately managed.</p> <p>3.7 The frequently asked questions at Appendix 2 outlines how the regional services interact with citywide and local services to ensure individual/family need is met in the most effective and timely manner possible:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Access to Food and Food Poverty (due to affordability) - Prescriptions - Financial hardship in areas other than food (e.g. utilities) - Social and Emotional Support <p>3.8 Please note the frequently asked questions are based on the official Department for Communities position on supporting vulnerable people. They will also be continually reviewed and updated as appropriate both by the Department for Communities and Belfast City Council.</p> <p><u>Financial implications</u></p> <p>3.9 None identified at this stage. There remains significant value in the existing Council contract with Red Cross, which is expected will cover any emergency needs within Belfast that the existing system and services cannot alleviate.</p> <p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications</u></p> <p>3.10 None identified at this stage</p>
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	<p>Appendix 1 – Strategic Community Partners ‘Lessons Learned’ Workshop 131020</p> <p>Appendix 2 – Support for Vulnerable People Frequently Asked Questions</p>