

## **Melksham COVID Recovery Workshop - 22 July 2020 at 7pm - Note of Meeting**

### **Attendees:**

Cllr Seed, Cllr Alford, Cllr Hubbard, Cllr Holder, Peter Dunford - Melksham Area Board

Cllr S Brown, David McKnight, Miriam Zaccarelli - Melksham Town Council

Cllr Shea-Simonds, Teresa Strange – Melksham Without Parish Council

Cllr Pendlebery - Bulkington Parish Council

Dr Jonathan Osborn GP - Giffords Surgery

Amanda Stuart – Community Connector, Primary Care Network

Jo Woodsford - Healthwatch Wiltshire

Farzana Saker - West Wiltshire Multi Faith Forum

Ashley Cornick - Healthier Communities, Wiltshire Council

Megan Stanley - Selwood Housing

Nigel Carter - Trustee of MIND

Sue Mortimer - Melksham Community Meals

Ian Drew - Melksham News

Paul Carter – taxi business

**Apologies:** Cllr Aves, Cllr Illman, Cllr Westbrook, Cllr Wood, Sam Gompels

The meeting **Chairman** was Cllr Alford in the absence of Cllr Seed who was delayed at Planning Committee, but would join the meeting later.

The **aims of the meeting** were explained:

1. This is only the start of a conversation about COVID recovery.
2. All public bodies will be discussing their individual approaches to recovery.
3. This evening is about stakeholders bringing their ideas to help build a shared picture across our town and villages.
4. No final decisions will be taken, but the outcomes from this discussion will feed into our recovery planning.

Participants were encouraged to **submit comments and responses** to the discussions in real-time through logging on to an audience interaction tool on their smartphone at [www.slido.com](http://www.slido.com) event code #88788.

Cllr Hubbard described a slide entitled “Melksham Community Support - The Way Forward” which outlined the proposed future roles of the 4 local organisations involved in the COVID Hub as we move from “response” into “recovery”. It was proposed that Melksham Town Council, Melksham Without Parish Council and the Melksham Area Board of Wiltshire Council will set the policy for the emergency response and to make the recovery happen and that Age Friendly Melksham CIC, working with other community partners and support groups including the Seniors Forum, will deliver services to people who are socially isolated/ vulnerable/ with mobility issues/ without a support network. This policy framework has been adopted by 3 of the partners to date – Melksham Area Board, Melksham Without Parish Council and Age Friendly Melksham CIC.

### **“What are our priorities for COVID recovery in Melksham and the wider community area?”**

#### **Comments included:**

- Building on the sustainable, local relationships made including continuing to support those residents without a support network (those who were socially isolated before COVID).
- We have found a lot of the "hard to reach" residents so let's not lose them again. Learn from what has been achieved so far, so that we are fit, ready and able to respond to a 2<sup>nd</sup> wave/ Wiltshire Lockdown/ or flu pandemic.
- Provide mental health first aid to all who need it (and recognise where/when it is needed).
- Do things differently and do things better.
- Reconnect people to their community eg older people to clubs and groups. Encouraging council, charities.
- Business should think outside the box in terms of opening hours, offers etc.
- Community cohesion and building a sense of community, and mutual care for others.

The issue was then broken down and discussed in 4 parts:

- **Economy**
- **Health and Wellbeing**
- **Community**
- **Care, education and safeguarding**

### **1. How do we support business and the high street in order to protect the local economy?**

David McKnight, Economic Development Manager for Melksham Town Council, introduced the discussion with a summary of the actions taken by the Town Council:

- **Maintaining our strategic direction**
  - Delivering objectives outlined in the Townwork report ‘Melksham 2020-2036’
- **Helping the town recover from COVID-19 Lockdown – the Melksham Action Plan**

- Supporting and advising town businesses and community organisations to help them reopen and/or restart safely, effectively and with improved marketing and professional PR;
- Social media campaigning to drive awareness of businesses and footfall in the town;
- Creating reasons to visit town businesses by promoting special offers and combining them with details of compelling activities, events and festivals;
- Encouraging residents and visitors to come to Melksham as part of a visit which embraces leisure and hospitality as well as retail;
- Working to maintain a level of continuity of annual town events and activities.

#### **Comments included:**

- Make use of Melksham's outside places as many people feel safer outside at the moment.
- Devizes has a fantastic hoarding on the approach to their town highlighting what is there.
- Encourage people back to the high street through joint promotion between traders and the Town Council, to include street events e.g. on market day.
- Build public confidence with regards to health and safety.
- Close part of the High Street to vehicles in the evenings and weekends so that cafes etc. can have seating areas outside on the pavement for a "Mediterranean cafe culture" in the summer months, with late night shopping, an evening market, entertainment from local community groups?
- Offer free parking and encourage people to understand that Melksham is open for business.
- To combat digital exclusion, a suggestion that the Town Council could offer support to those who are in financial hardship and who are shielding or isolating at home, to buy their own computer laptops in order to receive vital information and online support services.

## **2. The Recovery Phase - what does that 'look like' in Health?**

Jonathan Osborn GP introduced the discussion:

- Surgeries are open for business and experiencing a surge in demand. There has been a huge change in how services are delivered in Lockdown with a focus on consultations delivered by telephone and tele-conferencing.
- An Influenza vaccination programme is being planned for all over 50 year olds, to try to avoid a combined spike in flu with a second wave of COVID infections this Winter. Socially distanced measures to cope with the likely volumes of patients could involve surgeries held outdoors under canvass or as drive-throughs.
- There has been some reduction in access to secondary care services for non COVID treatments, so some patients are now on hospital waiting lists; those requiring X-ray have been referred to Trowbridge Hospital.
- Important public health messages are being promoted and more needs to be done to spread good practice within the community.

- Adverse mental wellbeing has been a hidden impact on many; physical activity and social contact are vitally important to prevent ill-health and isolation.

In response to the question “**How are you finding changes in the way that GP services are being delivered in Melksham as a result of COVID?**” most felt that more use of phone and teleconferencing by the surgeries had been a positive experience for patients, while also alleviating pressures on the GPs. This innovation had helped to keep contagious patients out of the waiting rooms and had reduced the need to travel to the surgery for those with mobility issues.

In response to the question “**How as a community can we help to publicise important public health messages?**” the feeling was that it was important for the public to see the same message in several places and from different organisations, on social media, noticeboards, word of mouth, village newsletters, in the Melksham News, leaflets in shops etc. Melksham Community Support now have 650 users on their books and could message them and keep in contact regularly by text message, as Giffords Surgery does.

**Other comments included:**

- The lack of support networks and activities for older people – e.g. at the Riverside Club – is creating a lack of sense of purpose and poor mental health for some older and more vulnerable people.
- Meetings in parks - e.g. at the cafe at KGV – could help to overcome social isolation.
- Melksham Community Meals continues to operate a delivery service to clients who struggle to shop or cook for themselves; many report feeling lonely and isolated.
- Mental health services delivered by charities such as MIND and Richmond Fellowship are available but have moved online; more counsellors need to be recruited to keep up with demand and a return to face-to-face meetings will be important.
- Teen Talk at Young Melksham provides counselling support to teenagers; referrals have been increasing here also.
- Some people have discovered exercise during lockdown and should be encouraged to continue with their new passion for running, walking, cycling etc.

**3. How do we rebuild our community activity and vitality, including maintaining levels of volunteering seen during the COVID crisis?**

Cllr Hubbard introduced the discussion from the perspective of his work with the COVID response hub:

We have seen the importance of community groups and clubs in tackling isolation, which has been exacerbated by lockdown. We should encourage community activities to re-launch in a safe and socially distanced way

We should support volunteers to get back to running their groups as normal, which is an extra challenge due to the amount of groups run by volunteers over 70 who may be more vulnerable. The COVID crisis has also created many new younger volunteers which shows that people are there and need to be connected to the many opportunities to volunteer, that older people are unable to do due to shielding still. It is important to recognise and thank volunteers for their contribution. The Melksham News offered to promote stories of local volunteering and opportunities to get involved, including a community award scheme to celebrate efforts and sacrifices.

This is a time when resources are limited but the need is greater than ever, so groups that focus on similar things may serve the community better if they work together and collaborate in order to maintain services and avoid duplication.

**Comments included:**

- We should support local businesses and help to widely promote local shops, services and community events locally.
- We now have a large pool of volunteers to tap into, a group that in many cases had never volunteered before and who have seen the benefit of being a member of the community; we need to maintain their enthusiasm and community spirit moving forward.
- Use the volunteer team to fill volunteering gaps e.g. LINK drivers to replace the over 70s who are still shielding, while those that are at home can be answering the phone for LINK.
- Give people confidence about safe working practices whilst reminding the volunteers of the importance of what they do for their community.
- Farzana Saker expressed interest in the vacant Art House Café premises as a potential centre of multi-cultural food and activity, subject to establishing costs and viability.

#### **4. How do we safely manage the reopening of our care homes and schools, while safeguarding public health?**

Cllr Phil Alford led the discussion, talking about his experiences as a teacher in a large secondary school, Sheldon in Chippenham.

Health and safety measures include classroom “bubbles”, staggered play and lunch times, a staggered timetable for different year groups, social distancing inside and outside the school premises, extensive cleaning regimes, hand sanitiser stations etc.

Cllr Nick Holder then talked about his experience as a manager in a Care Home company in Bristol.

Homes are carefully considering re-opening but are reluctant to take new referrals in order to protect existing patients and visitors from danger.

“Barrier nursing” has been used to protect medical staff against infection by patients and also to protect patients with COVID from spreading the virus to other non-infected people.

The drive-thru COVID testing centre at Bristol Airport is excellent with results received within 48 hours.

#### **Comments included:**

- Clear guidelines about social distancing, hand hygiene and masks at the entrance to schools are needed.
- Parental concerns for older teenagers sitting exams, regarding how the "year group bubble" will work, for instance if one pupil is infected then does all the year group have to isolate? And if they have siblings then does that affect another year group? Not sure how that can be managed and how to educate teenagers who think they are invincible and young children who don't understand?
- Anecdotally the most elderly residents are quite often “gung-ho” when out on the high street.
- Think it is much too early to open care homes!

#### **Next Steps**

A report of the meeting and actions arising will be considered by the Melksham Area Board at its next meeting on 8 September. A note of the meeting and the contributions captured on “slido” will be shared with participants and others in due course.

The Chairman thanked those attending and closed the meeting at 8.30pm.

**Report by Peter Dunford, Community Engagement Manager  
July 2020**