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Full Council Meeting 28th January 2021

FC082 To consider the provision of support to local residents in need during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond

1. Introduction

Recently Cuckfield Parish Council have discussed their desire to try and support the local community more, especially in light of the unprecedented issues faced in 2020 caused by COVID-19. The impact of this has created job losses throughout the country as well as the need for the more vulnerable members of our community to shield to remain safe.

At the recent Assets, Community and Environment committee meeting held on 26th November 2020 the Clerk advised that Burgess Hill Town Council run a combined initiative with other key groups within the town to provide approx. 250 Christmas hampers to those most in need within the immediate area, and that this included families in Cuckfield as well as other surrounding villages. It was resolved to investigate further and prepare a report to show how Cuckfield Parish Council could create their own similar initiative to serve the village.

In addition to this, the Council has recently become aware that there are many families within the village facing poverty at this time who require additional support and who have been received donations of food and funds via both Holy Trinity School and Church.

2. Approach

Burgess Hill Town Council kindly shared their report providing background to the Christmas Hamper initiative they run, and a meeting was held with the organiser of the project, Jen O'Grady, to review key points and things to consider.

A meeting has also been held with key representatives within the village from the Holy Trinity School, Church, the Foodbank and COVID-19 support group to discuss how additional help can be provided to those most in need.

3. Findings

Food Parcels

Over recent months Holy Trinity Church and School have been coordinating donations of food and money and distributing these amongst those in need who are connected to the school. This has been most welcome, especially over the Christmas period. Many families are falling through the cracks as they may not typically qualify for Foodbank help, or indeed may be unwilling to approach them for support, but this does not mean they are not in need of assistance.

Fresh food is a particular issue to provide as this is not received via donations, so a way of providing fresh items to families would be welcome. The Foodbank are happy to offer a bulk delivery of items to the school for them to disperse amongst those in need. The Queen's Hall has been offered as a location to collate food parcels should additional space be required, especially whilst during lockdown, and the COVID-19 Support Group have many volunteers on hand who would be happy to complete this task.

Christmas Hampers

Burgess Hill Town Council does not run this initiative alone; it works alongside 4 other local organisations as part of a multi-agency group to support families at Christmas.

The project starts around July each year by reaching out to partner agencies (e.g. local Foodbank, businesses and charities) to try and secure both volunteer support and funding to work alongside the Council to drive the project forwards. The number of hampers to be made available is agreed at this time to enable associated costs and food requirements to be planned.

Around October nomination forms are issued to local voluntary organisations and statutory agencies (doctor's surgery, schools) to request nominations be submitted to identify families who would most benefit from this support. This is done via completion of a nomination form, submitted with the permission of the family being nominated to meet GDPR requirements. A sift is done at this point to remove any duplications, as single families can be nominated by more than one agency.

Advertising is done to request donations of food or financial contributions to support the hampers, and boxes and labels for the hampers are purchased.

Volunteers are recruited to support building the hampers which is done over several days in the lead up to the distribution dates. Hampers could either be collected or delivered; deliveries are done by the voluntary agencies involved in the nominations.

4. Costs

Food Parcels

There are no costs involved with these to date as reliance has been placed on sharing donations received. However there are grants available from WSCC which can be applied for to supplement the items already being donated.

Christmas Hampers

The costs involved with producing 250 hampers this year for Burgess Hill and surrounding areas was £2,155; assuming Cuckfield were to target producing 50 hampers it would be fair to assume the costs to do so would be approximately £750, depending on the amount of food donations received. Costs include boxes, labels, publicity materials and additional food.

The Queen's Hall could be used to store items and pack the hampers, which would be made available free of charge.

5. Recommendations

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic it was clear that the Parish Council was not in a position to offer much in the way of support to local residents as this level of community support has not been an area of focus in the past.

Reviewing the impact of COVID on the community has highlighted the need to do more to counteract what looks likely to be more than a short-term impact as repeated lockdowns continue. With the stresses on families caused by job losses/furlough schemes and consequent reduced incomes it is critical that the Parish Council works with others to ensure those in need receive food and support throughout the year, not just at Christmas.

Food Parcels

After the first meeting, the Clerk reached out to Warden Park and Cuckfield Medical Practice to see whether there are other families in need of additional support at this time. The Clerk has also applied for the Sussex Community Foundation COVID Winter Fund in order to provide funds to secure fresh food items and award donations to enable families to cover their core utility bills where required.

Christmas Hampers

The following steps are recommended:

- i. Identify partners to work with on this project. Potential partners include Independent Society of Cuckfield, Cuckfield Society, Affinity Sutton/Clarion Housing, Haywards Heath Foodbank, Cuckfield Medical Practice, Holy Trinity Primary School, Warden Park Academy and

Cuckfield Preschool.

It's also worth considering working with neighbouring Parish Councils, for example Ansty and Staplefield, in order to provide hampers for any families in need living within their parish as these families are likely to be attending the schools and medical practice in the village. If agreed, we should also contact Staplefield Primary School.

The doctor's surgery and schools would be able to advise how many pupil premium pupils they have within the area, to give an idea of how many hampers we should be aiming to produce.

- ii. Agree the number of hampers to be provided in 2021, 50 is a reasonable target to consider although this could vary based on the feedback received from support agencies. It is better to start smaller for the first year, to ensure there are enough resources available to fulfil the needs of the community.
- iii. Identify local businesses who are willing to support food collection, and even make donations to the project. The Queen's Hall is already being used as a foodbank donation point, as well as the Co-op at Whitemans Green. This could be expanded to other businesses within the village to ensure maximum opportunity for donations to be made throughout the week. Local schools could run a non-uniform day in exchange for donations, for example.
- iv. Create publicity materials to share online, advertising the project and asking for food donations to be made, as well as potentially asking for financial donations to be made directly to the foodbank to support the purchase of additional food to contribute to the hampers.
- v. Request nominations from local agencies and review to remove duplicates.
- vi. Recruit volunteers to assist with putting together the hampers and schedule the dates for this to take place. Book the Queen's Hall and complete a risk assessment to share in advance with all volunteers.
- vii. Schedule collection/delivery of hampers to recipients.

Name: Sam Heynes

Title: Parish Clerk

Date: 21st January 2021