

# REPORT



Bridgwater Town Council

<b>Report to:</b>	Finance and Policy Executive Committee
<b>Agenda Item:</b>	FEC2022/34
<b>Date of this Report:</b>	26 September 2022
<b>Meeting Date:</b>	29 September 2022
<b>Authors:</b>	AM Gould, Cllr Marsh & Town Clerk

---

## Community Drop-in Days / Warm Spaces Report

---

### Background

There is a cost-of-living crisis in the UK and indeed across the world resulting in unprecedented pressures on people this winter. Despite the support given by Government, thousands of people in Bridgwater will be forced to make tough decisions about when and what they eat, what they can do in life, and when they can afford to heat their home.

However, council need to be mindful that there could be a stigma attached to the Warm Spaces initiative and this council should focus more on a community drop-in day that will help its residents to socialise and unlock loneliness over the dark winter.

### The Rationale

From April 2022 Ofgem increased their price cap for default (standard variable tariffs) and prepayment meter tariffs by 54 per cent. This raised the bills of 22 million gas and electricity customers by an average of between £693 and £708 depending on how they pay. This is on top of the price increase that came in October 2021. The price cap for October 2022 has been set by the government but is estimated to add another 20%, this would see the average bill increase to around £2,500 a year for gas and electricity.

The government's position on support is evolving, with some measures already announced and paid, including a £150 council tax rebate, a £400 grant through the Energy Bill Support Scheme, £300 for pensioners, and extra £150 for those with disabilities and an expansion of the Household Support Fund. However, the reality is that for most families, this support is not enough to cover the price rises of food, fuel and other necessities. This means that although people will have an extra money to go towards their energy costs it may not make enough of a difference.

**Loneliness** has no common cause. Sometimes it can be triggered by a life event or change in situation, or it may not be triggered by anything at all.

We all experience feeling lonely in different ways. This means there are a range of ways we can try to overcome loneliness and providing a warm space with activities and support could help. It's important to remember that loneliness and difficult feelings can pass.

The idea of sharing a warm space during the winter months has been widely adopted across the Country.

## **The Plan**

A weekly drop in to be held on Tuesdays at the Town Hall between 18<sup>th</sup> October until the end of February/March (depending on necessity and success of the sessions). The sessions will be held between 10am-4pm in the Charter Hall.

Visitors will have access to free hot drinks including tea, coffee, hot chocolate (biscuit or cake maybe?) Lidl have contacted the office to offer a donation of beverage supplies (and hopefully some biscuits).

Newspapers, books, card games, board games, crossword and colouring pages (free downloads). The office is now building a good selection of board games from charity shops but can encourage further donation once up and running.

An assortment of leaflets and posters will be displayed offering information and signposting to other organisations which may be helpful. Safety has been considered and discussed. All areas of the building will be locked except the toilets and Charter Hall. The caretaker will monitor the toilets throughout the day and if signs of misuse are noted then a discussion can take place as to whether we keep them locked. Ann-Marie will be the main member of staff at each session and will not be lone working as the caretaker will be onsite, and hopefully volunteers will also be present. David also has a view to cameras in his office to spot any issues.

### **Providing advice and information**

The feedback from local organisations has been very positive and supportive. Many have provided leaflets and posters and an array of organisations are keen to come to the sessions to offer informal information on services and support available. These visits would be spaced out and over the period of the project and not necessarily every week. It is clearly specified that only non -profit charities which offer a free service will be welcome. Confirmed so far:

- Diversity Voice – For those who English is their second language
- Mind – mental health
- Somerset Drugs and Alcohol services – alcohol and substance abuse, how to refer a loved one or who to go to for help if these issues are affecting family or friends
- Deafinate – sign language and the challenges of hearing loss.
- Navigate – debt management, financial wellbeing assessments, grant advice.
- Age Concern – befriending/ ageing well/ falls prevention
- Somerset County Council – Public health dept are very keen and are requesting a regular slot to talk about nutritional eating on a budget, exercise and looking after one's mental health.

There are others which are in the pipeline but not yet confirmed. All groups would attend free of charge and would have to meet the criteria set out above in offering something useful to the community at no cost. We would also carry literature and have some knowledge on how to signpost our visitors to the food bank, street link and other emergency support services.

### **Educating and sharing ideas**

The drop in would offer sessions in which we can educate and share ideas on themes such as zero waste cooking, family meals for £5, draught proofing your home and knitting your own blankets. The aim would be to draw on the 'community experts' who are already active in the town for their ideas and who hopefully will give us their time too.

### **Fun interactive sessions**

The drop in will offer a regular session within the broader session which will involve some interactions which will offer the community ideas on low-cost hobbies and give them the

opportunity to meet new people. We could have sessions which are of no cost to the drop-in such as general knowledge quizzes, chess tournaments, shared reading groups and then have low-cost sessions such as cupcake decorating, making Christmas card, knitting etc., some of this could be financed by donations. The Morrisons Distribution Centre in Bristol Road has expressed an interest in donating once the sessions are up and running. Again, with the emphasis on community, there is a potential here to tap into the expertise and kindness of local people who would be happy to share the passion in their hobbies.

### **Creating Awareness of the Community Days**

To get the word out we need use a combination of channels. Social Media, local advertising with posters/leaflets and liaising with service providers, organisations, schools, and community centres to make the community aware that we are there every Tuesday for a chat and a cup of tea. As there will be different organisations coming on specific dates our message will need to be consistent and regular, talking about what we have done in previous weeks, sharing ideas and recipes via social media and handouts to engage people to come and see what it's all about.

### **Volunteers**

We would endeavor to encourage local councillors and members of the community to spare a few hours to come in and have a cup of tea and a chat, and maybe a game of cards with the drop in visitors. At this point in the process, we have not approached anyone but do feel there are people who would be more than willing to get involved.

### **Facilities available around the town**

Along with putting our own plan together we have spoken to other organisations across the town with a view to building and distributing a weekly timetable to inform the community of what else is available. We have so far collected the following information:

- **St Mary's Church** will continue to run their 'babychinos' parents coffee morning, their weekly crafting groups and reflection sessions and their Thursday 'grubs up' sessions which provide a few hot meals to children and their parents. They are concerned with how cold the church can get through the winter months with the rising energy costs but have said they will monitor that situation and hope it will not cause disruption to the role they play in the community. There is a café at the church which is affordable but not free.
- Lizzie Ashwell at **Bridgwater Library** said they will continue to run the various free groups which include ancestry research groups, crafting, Lego clubs etc. They also offer free use of their computers which is very popular. Lizzie says they are expecting and are prepared for more visitors over the winter months, the drawback to the library is that it has no public toilets or refreshments.
- **Bridgwater Museum** – I have spoken to Mike Searle who says they are planning to open the museum Saturdays only from November to April. However, he does not feel he has the space for people to 'come in and sit around'.
- Cllr Liz Marsh has been speaking to **Victoria Park Community Centre** who have said they will be able to offer a free cup of tea on a Wednesday to coincide with the Over 55s lunch club. The community Centre also runs a very affordable youth club.
- **Bridgwater Baptist Church** on St Mary's Street will continue to run their coffee morning, crafting group and toddler group throughout the winter. These sessions are not free but are very affordable (e.g., £1 a family with refreshments provided)

- Barry at **Sydenham Community Centre** says he is open to running a coffee morning if there is enough interest, however he has seen a marked decrease in visitors to the centre's clubs since Covid, he will be extending his current 'stroke club' to those with other life limiting health conditions – this group involves activities and a hot meal every Friday. There is a small charge. The community Centre also has some great (and affordable) sessions in gardening, boxing, and crafting etc., but nothing free of charge.
- **Westfield Church** continue to offer support to the homeless with their twice weekly drop in. They also have a coffee morning once a week; however, these facilities are chargeable, and they use their café to provide refreshments.
- John Hardy of **the Hub in Angel Place** continues to run an invaluable service to the community, he hosts various weekly groups including the talking café with the Village agents. The space up there is filled with helpful leaflets, items that people may need like coats and hats, and he also works with Lesley Gates to provide frozen food (prepared by Lesley) to those who need it.
- **Holy Trinity Church Hamp** holds a community café twice a week which they serve free drinks and biscuits.
- Sadly, despite several attempts being made I have not had a response from the YMCA, but we know that Purple Spoon operates from there and that their activities and groups tend to incur a charge.
- Cllr Smedley was to enquire about the Arts Centre.

### **Recommendations**

Councillors to approve holding a Community Drop-in Day at the Town Hall and the direction of travel in the report and that Ann-Marie will be the lead member of staff working with Cllr Marsh as the portfolio holder for Community. The Town Clerk will have overall sign-off and will review the success of the project every 4 weeks. Extra costs will be incurred for staff time on the day (taken from underspend within staffing budget). Other costs covering consumables not covered by donations will come from existing budget headings, resulting in no overspend.