

Community Services and Business Planning Policy and Scrutiny Committee

Date:	14 September 2020
Classification:	General Release
Title:	Westminster Connects
Report of:	Debbie Jackson, Executive Director, Growth Planning & Housing
Cabinet Member Portfolio	Councillor Paul Swaddle, Cabinet Member for Community Services and Digital www.westminster.gov.uk/cabinet)
Wards Involved:	All
Policy Context:	City for All
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1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 Westminster Connects was established in March/April 2020 to provide information to residents about Covid-19 and the council's response, to coordinate the efforts of the voluntary sector to respond, and to direct the activities of thousands of volunteers who wanted to help those who were made vulnerable by Covid-19.
- 1.2 Westminster Connects operated as a helpline and a focal point on the council's websites to direct residents to support. It also maintained a CRM and way of contacting the almost 10,000 Westminster residents who were shielding. It delivered meals, shopping and medicines, as well as wellbeing support to isolated and shielding residents.
- 1.3 The purpose of this report is to summarise what Westminster Connects delivered during the first phase of the pandemic, detail the lessons learned, and discuss the plans for the development of Westminster Connects in the future.
- 1.4 In a short period of time, Westminster Connects was able to mobilise thousands of residents to support those who were made more vulnerable by the pandemic, and to mobilise staff, VCS organisations and businesses to work collaboratively.

- 1.5 Residents and community organisations valued having one phone number, central information point and people able to answer multiple questions about services, and make referrals to meet residents' needs.
- 1.7 Businesses who wanted to contribute to the response valued being directed to where the most urgent needs were, and contributed greatly to food supply and refrigeration, meal [preparation, and PPE supply.
- 1.8 The opportunity exists now to continue to work with the good will of the volunteers and expand the range of volunteer opportunities beyond a pandemic response.
- 1.9 As Covid-19 will be present in the community for some time, the ongoing base of support in Westminster Connects can be used to scale up or scale down services should there be future lockdowns.

2. Key Matters for the Committee's Consideration

Committee is asked to consider:

- I. The progress made in the past 4 months since establishing Westminster Connects.
- II. Our plans and ambition to develop Connects to support City for All and respond to a second wave of the pandemic.

3. Background

Appendix 1 sets out further information regarding the Westminster Connects and for consideration by Committee:

Section	What the Section covers
Introduction	Overview of the elements of Connects, who we help and the people and organisations who contribute
Context	Considering the different contexts between the emergency phase of the pandemic and the recovery phase
Service Impact and achievements	Needs met, volunteers deployed, feedback from volunteers and VCS and business involvement
Lessons learned	Sets out the lessons learned from the first phase in terms of the shielding, volunteers, opportunities, systems and the council
Connects Vision	Aims and objectives for future development, transforming Connects into a bigger, more wide reaching volunteer force which supports residents, extends the reach of council services, and builds stronger connections with the VCS and with businesses.

If you have any queries about this Report or wish to inspect any of the Background Papers, please contact Report Author Christine Mead 07817 053912 cmead@westminster.gov.uk

APPENDICES: 1 Presentation on Westminster Connects

Glossary for presentation:

BAME – Black and Minority Ethnic communities

DBS – Disclosure and Barring Service, checks carried out to ensure people are safe to work with or support vulnerable people

Shielding – residents categorised by their doctors as Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (CEV) and advised to stay home during the period of national lockdown and for an extended period afterwards, to protect them from Covid-9

VCS – Voluntary and Community Sector, charities and organisations working with volunteers to support individuals and communities