

Coronavirus Update from Wiltshire Council by the Archdeacon of Wilts the Ven Sue Groom

I am a member of VASEC on behalf of the diocese (voluntary and faith groups forum). This means I am a point of contact for the Council for a variety of questions, eg: How many grave spaces are there in Wiltshire churchyards? What work is the church doing with young people in Wiltshire? How will faith groups respond to bodies being stored before disposal? I also receive draft Council policies and procedures to comment on such as those for 'excessive deaths' (ie when there are far more deaths than usual).

I participated in the first Skype call this morning 'to discuss the support work of faith communities during the Covid-19 outbreak.' It proved to be the most helpful and informative conversation so far.

Perhaps the best way to keep up to date with the Council is to monitor the website and to sign up for regular emails: <http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/public-health-coronavirus>

It is updated most days and includes:

- A Community Pack to download with various contact details and advice;
- A Volunteer Pack with advice on how to go about volunteering (modelled to a large extent on the work initiated by Revd Keith Brindle of St James, Southbroom and Chair of Churches Together in Devizes);
- A Community Groups Directory – listing over 400 groups of volunteers working within Wiltshire;
- A link to the Wiltshire Wellbeing Hub which has 10,500 vulnerable people on their books. The Wellbeing Hub links in with local voluntary groups to provide support wherever possible.

The Council is keen to engage with faith groups to find out what we are already doing in communities, to facilitate our responses, and to link different groups together.

The Council has set up two projects funded by Wiltshire Community Foundation to work with disaffected vulnerable young people in Swindon and Melksham during the lockdown. If these projects prove fruitful then similar ones may be set up across Wiltshire.

The Council has observed that the number of volunteers across the county has increased substantially and the average age of volunteers has decreased – a new younger generation is engaged. There is concern is about sustainability going forwards.

However, the major concern moving forwards is about finances for organisations and individuals and the impact of a vast increase in unemployment.

The Local Resilience Forum in Wiltshire is led by Wiltshire Police.

Wiltshire Community Foundation has set up a Wiltshire and Swindon Coronavirus Response Fund <https://www.wiltshirecf.org.uk/Coronavirus%20Fund> to provide emergency help to voluntary groups, including churches. This fund responds very quickly to requests for grants.

AD Wilts, 30 April 2020