

Report on Winter Pressures Project March 2023

In September the Communities Team was tasked with delivering the Winter Pressures project. The Winter Pressures project consisted of two deliverables: 1) Warm Hubs across the district; 2) A Housing Emergency Financial Support Fund for tenants in need of urgent support.

In late October an officer was appointed to lead on the Winter Pressures project.

Warm Hubs

A significant amount of preparatory work was needed in order for us to open Warm Hubs across the district and this mobilisation was achieved in a very short timescale by the Communities Team. This included:

- A comprehensive mapping exercise to find out where warm hubs were being opened by others across the District, and where there would be gaps
- A Risk Assessment to understand the risks involved in running the Warm Hubs and to explore how those would be mitigated, including looking at health and safety measures and determining the staffing required
- Visiting every centre to ensure the centre was up to standard in regards to Health and Safety, and then to ensure resources were in place to open each centre as a warm and welcoming space
- Arranging deep cleans for a number of the centres
- Designing publicity and A-boards for the centres, with support from Strata
- Organising a weekly cleaning schedule with an external contractor (once it was established that StreetScene couldn't accommodate the extra demand)
- Collaborating with the Rentals team, who helped run the Warm Hubs in the weeks before Christmas
- Recruiting a new staff member into the Communities Team to support the Warm Hubs after Christmas

On the **28th November**, we opened **10 weekly Warm Hubs** across East Devon. The 10 venues were:

- Monday: Dunning Court Community Centre, Honiton, EX14 1FQ
Ratcliffe House Community Centre, Burnside, EX8 3AQ
Waffle at the Hospital, Seaton
- Tuesday: Millwey Community Centre, Axminster, EX13 5EW
Trumps Court Community Centre, Sidmouth, EX10 8BL – Closed end of January 2023
Bidmead Community Centre EX8 2TF, Exmouth (replaced on 30/01/2023 by Churchill Court Lympstone)
- Wednesday: Broadview Community Centre, Broadclyst, EX5 3HA
- Thursday: Lymebourne Community Centre, Sidmouth, EX10 9HZ
Yonder Close Community Centre EX11 1HE, Ottery St Mary
- Friday: Park Close Community Centre, Woodbury

Sharing our model

In the weeks before Christmas, the Project Officer received numerous calls from Parish Councils asking for advice on how to open a warm hub, as our Warm Hubs were some of the first to open.

A researcher from Exeter University has attended Broadclyst Warm Hub and Lymebourne Warm Hub in order to understand what makes Warm Hubs work.

A Success Story

To date, since opening, we have had **1036** separate visits to the Warm Hubs. These visits have been made by **221** different residents of East Devon. The youngest visitor was **8 months old, the oldest 96**. The visitors have come from all types of housing including EDDC sheltered housing; EDDC General Needs housing; privately rented homes, and a small number of privately owned homes.

The busiest Hub is Broadview, in Broadclyst. By Wednesday 1st March **215** visits had been made to that Hub in 14 weeks. We think this is because it is the most rural of our Hubs and there is very little other provision locally, and so it draws in visitors from the surrounding villages.

One of the respondents from Broadclyst said:

"I have personally found the Warm Hub to be a completely wonderful service which has surpassed my expectations, and I know that many other tenants share my views on this!

It is not just a functional warm space, but a positive, joyful, welcoming and fun place to spend time.

We have a real mix of tenants here – from the elderly to youngsters and middle-aged people like myself – most have physical difficulties/disabilities and are at home for the majority of the day.

Personally, I have found the Warm Hub to be a lifeline and an absolute godsend! I am very sociable but became very lonely, depressed and isolated [during Covid]. The weekly Warm Hubs have really helped me feel positive and happy again and I have made some very good friends." N- Broadclyst

We set up a **contract with local charity Waffle** for them to provide a Warm Hub in Seaton, as there is no EDDC community centre in Seaton. Waffle's aim is to reduce social isolation and they have two venues, one in Axminster (the Waffle house), and one in the old community hospital building in Seaton. Since the Warm Hub opened, EDDC tenants have been able to go into the café on a Monday and get free tea, coffee and toast. **42** residents have taken advantage of this provision, with many returning every week.

The quietest is Warm Hub Dunning Court in Honiton, it is likely this because it is right in the centre of the town with a range of other support offered locally.

We have served over **730** hot meals including **118** fully plated Christmas dinners.



Christmas Dinner at Yonder Close

We have given out over **200** free blankets, **500** hats, gloves and pairs of socks. The disparity between visitor numbers and woolly items are because we respond to requests from the MSOs, charities and social workers for warm items for our EDDC tenants who don't attend the Hubs.



Warm blankets and hats at Dunning Court

We have organised benefits surgeries and Budgeting Workshops to help the tenants access the benefits they are entitled to as well as trying to help them manage their money more effectively.

“The Warm Hub leader put me in touch with an organisation which checks if you are on the right benefits and that you are getting all the help you are entitled to. I have managed to increase my money by quite a lot since speaking to them.” E –Sidmouth.

“Through the Warm Hub, I have been helped by ECOE who organised a home energy advice visit for me. They gave me energy saving tips and helped me talk to my energy provider about my energy arrears and setting up a payment plan.

Through the Warm Hub I have also been referred to the Food Bank in Broadclyst, who are now delivering me weekly food parcels, as I have been cutting out food to try and pay my rising bills. This is a HUGE help” N – Broadclyst

We have also arranged more “fun” activities and workshops. In each Warm Hub we have run cookery classes ‘Easy Cooking on a Budget’ ; a series of Rag Rugging Workshops, which involved recycling waste materials into “rag rugs”; seated Tai Chi sessions, and a musical performance.



Tenants enjoying “cooking on a budget” at Woodbury



Tenants enjoying cooking on a budget at Broadview Community Centre



Everyone enjoyed rag rugging at Lympstone



Seated Tai Chi at Woodbury



Tenants enjoying the musical performance at Ratcliffe

By far the most beneficial aspect of the Warm Hubs has been the social aspect; overwhelmingly the visitors have told us again and again that they value the chance to socialise and meet their neighbours over everything else. The feedback forms are full of people saying how much they value the social interaction.

What was your favourite experience or moment?

“Meeting people, playing games and having lunch, even if we don’t have any money we can have a hot meal once a week.” L - EX5

“The weekly Warm Hubs have really helped me feel positive and happy again and I have made some very good friends” S – Axminster.

Finally the one thing everyone agrees on is that they really want the Hubs to continue at the end of March, **all 61 respondents** to the feedback questionnaire said they wanted the Warm Hubs to continue.

Housing Emergency Financial Support Fund

Setting up the Emergency Financial Support Fund required writing a policy and procedure for accessing the fund; establishing audit processes and financial controls; setting up a partnership agreement with the Financial Resilience Team, and writing a Data Protection Notice. The fund was launched early in March, after being approved by the Resident Involvement Management Group.

Some examples of who we have helped include a tenant who came into Lymptstone Warm Hub reporting he was freezing in his home. The officer present was able to buy him some credit for his meter whilst seeking to understand and address the complex reasons that he had become unable to afford his heating.

In other example, a tenant at Broadview Warm Hub had completely run of food. As well as making a referral to the foodbank, the officer present was able to buy some dog food for the family dog.

We also helped a family with young children needed money on their meter, so they could stay warm until their next payment was due. Finally, we helped one tenant was unable to afford the carpets in a property she was being required to move to, after being moved out of another EDDC property that was carpeted. After it was established that neither the Financial Resilience Team nor any local group or charity could support her, we were able to offer support.

We anticipate more demand on this fund now the policy and procedure has been shared with all frontline Housing officers.

A full report into the Winter Pressure project will be available by the beginning of May.

