



# RADFORD SEMELE PARISH COUNCIL

## Report of the Covid19 Mutual Help Group for Radford Semele

When the national lockdown was announced on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020, which had followed a period during which time vulnerable adults had already been self-isolating since February, while initially being a shock, attention turned to how would people live from day to day with such severe social restrictions being in place.

For many reasons, around the UK mutual COVID support groups were being established to help those vulnerable and isolating to obtain prescriptions or simply buying food as supermarket home delivery services were completely overwhelmed by the demand. There was also the spectre of some families ending up in difficult financial situations as family members lost jobs and livelihoods overnight. While the Government did start to put support in place, they were initially and continue to be dependent on the COVID support groups to help make these provisions work.

Here in Radford, while we were grateful for an established community network through the likes of the sports and social club or other village organisations and networks, there was still the possibility that many people could fall between the cracks. Some questions were put back to the Parish Council, many of whom fell into the age category of people who were instructed to self-isolate, as to what we could do to support the community.

In Radford, Bogdan Alecsa took the initiative to start a COVID support group Facebook Page to garner support from the village and very quickly a body of residents came forward willing to support the group in helping anyone who was vulnerable or simply in a bad place as a result of the pandemic restrictions. The challenge was how to turn this overwhelming outpouring of support into something that could be managed and focussed. The Parish Council alongside Bogdan looked at what resources would be needed and the best way to capture requests for help and coordinate the village support effort.

With the help of Lorna Tallwin, a What'sApp group was set up as a means to contact and co-ordinate the great team of helpers who came forward, in the end we had a pool of 65 village residents (and some more from outside the village as well), all eager to run errands, or simply check in and support vulnerable or lonely residents when they needed it.

To reach out to the village, a leaflet delivery was arranged to every household letting them know there was help if they needed, with an e-mail address and vitally a telephone help line, supported by the Parish Council, residents could contact the support group and ask for help, assistance, advice or simply have someone to talk to.

It was great to see people with a wide range of skills, experience and knowledge come forward able to guide the group on how to safely support vulnerable or highly vulnerable residents.

One issue that came to the fore early on in the lockdown period was that many residents traditionally relied on using cash for shopping and were not familiar or comfortable with on-line shopping. Also the message in the pandemic management was to move away from handling cash, but in many cases those self-isolating were not able to visit banks or cashpoints to get cash anyway so how would they pay for shopping, or pay someone who was assisting them with shopping. We need not have worried

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as Gurinder and Gujit Ghag at the Best One Shop immediately and without hesitation stepped up with a solution that allowed residents to purchase food and essentials, offering a tab to those who needed it to ensure that residents would not go short of things – Gurinder even managed to track down toilet rolls!!! This support to the village cannot be overstated in terms of the importance and surety this gave residents worrying about even being able to buy food.

The value of the Best One shop was recognised by the Parish Council, not least in the fact that there was a risk to Gurinder and his family running the shop with so many residents visiting it, so it was agreed to provide and install screens for the staff at the paypoint and post office counter.

Over the period of lock down and the few further restrictive periods this year, the COVID support group were called to action just short of 100 times. However, this is not the full picture, as those needed help gained confidence in their fellow villagers supporting them, often further contact and support was dealt with directly. Feedback from supporters and residents, indicate that the number of instances of support in many different ways was at least 3 times the tracked instances reported through the co-ordinated routes, and was probably more.

However, this report is not about the numbers, but more how much the challenges of the pandemic brought about a renewed sense of community in Radford Semele, new friendships were forged amongst the supporters and with those needing support.

That sense of “village” has reignited the desire to run a village carnival, initially as a thought to bring together and thank those who have supported the group and also the hope that we would also be able to bring out those who had to stay in and isolate through this torrid time.

Unfortunately, the “clean end” to the pandemic we had all hoped for does not appear to be materialising yet, we aren’t yet all in a place to raise a glass and say thank goodness that is all over, and while there is hope at the end of the tunnel, the support group still remains ready to help in needs, be. Ideas of what the support group could develop into, are still on hold, but it is timely at the Parish Assembly to thank all those who have come together to support the village through this difficult time, there are so many that we should mention, but by that there is the risk of missing someone too as so many came forward to contribute, in some cases a small way has had a big impact on those receiving that help and there are those that have been helping outside of the COVID support group, so we should not forget them.

While we can celebrate those that have come forward willing to help support the group, we should also not forget those that we have lost in the village either directly or indirectly as a result of the Coronavirus – there are those that are no longer with us and those that may be living with the aftereffects of the virus.

There will be time when we are in a better place and be able to look back raise that glass, but for now, we do thank those supporters who took the initiative to set the group up, to those with an organising mind to develop tools to make the work the group has done, manageable. The Best One shop for giving the village workable options so no one would be left without essentials, those in the support group with specialist skills to ensure the most vulnerable were able to be helped, to the Parish Council who gave clear support without question to ensure that resources were and would be there when and where need, and to all the group supporters who are continuing and ready to support the village of Radford Semele.

Thank you.