

Council launches virtual support hubs to provide help to local communities

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A helpline, webpage and support network have been set up to help people in County Durham who are struggling during the Coronavirus pandemic.

Following government advice that people with certain health conditions must stay isolated for the next 12 weeks in order to be shielded from the virus, we also want to reassure residents that they will receive the help they need.

County Durham Together has been set up by us to provide people with support, either through established networks of community or volunteer groups, or from the council itself through staff volunteers.

We will be able to help with a number of requests, such as food shopping, deliveries, general help and guidance, or someone who can listen and support.

People are advised to accept help from friends, family and neighbours where possible, but anyone in need of extra support can find a list of local groups on [Durham Locate website](#) or fill in our Coronavirus help form on www.durham.gov.uk/covid19help.

Those enquiries will be directed to our virtual council hubs, staffed by AAP workers and council volunteers, who will assess any requests for information and provide appropriate help to residents.

Alternatively, help can be accessed by emailing help@durham.gov.uk or calling 03000 260 260.

Volunteering

We are also urging anyone willing and able to volunteer to register their interest on our website.

This will allow workers to match their skills and availability with the needs of residents in their local area and ensure that volunteers as well as the vulnerable access appropriate advice to keep themselves safe.

Local voluntary groups, businesses and other agencies who can offer help in the community are also being encouraged to join the hub to support people in this time of crisis.

People should fill in an online form at www.durham.gov.uk/covid19volunteer or call 03000 260 260.

Once they have registered their interest and their details are verified, their services will be added to our Locate site, where people in need will be able to find their information.

Cllr Simon Henig, leader of the council, said: "We understand that this is a very worrying time for a lot of people, particularly those who will be self-isolating for a prolonged period of time. Our message to those people is that they are not alone. Their care remains our priority.

"We hope the launch of this service will reassure residents that support will always be there. We would remind residents though that our services are being stretched during these unprecedented times and we would continue to encourage people, where possible, to use their trusted network of family and friends in the first instance of need."

Jo Laverick, the executive director of Durham Community Action, said: "In this rapidly changing climate, it is vital that we all work together to protect our most vulnerable and this community hub will help us to do that. Knowing that help and support is available will go a long way in reassuring residents.

"I would also urge any group or individual who is able to volunteer or is already providing help in their community to register online so we can make best use of our resources and support as many people as possible."