**Update on Welfare Coordination Hubs and Shielding**

Cumbria County Council has now established the 6 new COVID-19 welfare support hubs to provide targeted support for those at increased risk of severe illness from coronavirus (COVID-19). The County Council has been working closely with District Council, CVS, Cumbria Community Foundation, community and voluntary sector, private sector and military to establish arrangements in each district area to coordinate the supply of essential food, medicines and supplies.

The hubs are virtual, describing the close working arrangements between the County Council and partners. They’re not physical buildings in specific locations available for public access.

Family, friends and wider communities across the County are already playing a significant part helping to support each other and their more vulnerable neighbours but in some areas of the county there will a smaller number of vulnerable and isolated individuals who will need to rely on the County Council to link them up with support.

The welfare hubs will match the requests for help from those in high risk groups with support being offered by community groups, volunteers, councils and businesses. There is already widespread community and voluntary sector support for the response to Covid-19 across Cumbria with informal support mechanisms, including neighbourhood WhatsApp groups and community Facebook groups, alongside a commitment from existing community emergency planning groups, local churches and faith groups and formal voluntary sector organisations who are working with Councils and NHS.

The new welfare coordination hubs have been set up as part of a wider network of support across the country at the request of the Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government to support 1.5 million people who are shielding. It will take a little while before the Government’s ‘shielding’ scheme is fully operational in Cumbria, but I can give assurances that Cumbria County Council, District Councils and partners are already working together to coordinate immediate help to those at highest risk with no support networks.

In addition the Council has set up a free emergency support service for those people who are at an increased risk, including the over 70’s, pregnant women and people with underlying health conditions who are protecting themselves by staying at home. The free 0800 number will be live on **Monday 30th March.** The call centre will operate Monday to Friday 9.00am to 5pm and 10am to 2pm at weekends or by emailing. The service will also accepts referrals from members of the public who may be concerned about people in their community.

The hubs will have welfare coordinators available over the weekend to deal with any urgent requests for food or medicines.