

# Social Prescriber Link Worker Role during COVID-19

Social prescribing link workers form part of the multidisciplinary teams in primary care networks (PCNs) and are uniquely placed to work closely with GPs, local authorities, health and care professionals and voluntary sector partners to coordinate support for these people whilst they are self-isolating.

## **Extremely Vulnerable Group- the Shielded**

People on the list have been sent a letter from the NHS telling them if they are extremely vulnerable and should self-isolate for 12 weeks. The letter advises people to register on the following site to inform whether they do or do not require support

<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-extremely-vulnerable>

The responses from those that registered are downloaded on a daily basis by the Community Response Units (CRUs) for Derby and Derbyshire.

In order to prioritise calls, those that answered the question “Do you have a way of getting essential supplies delivered at the moment?” as ‘No’ are filtered out of the responses and then contacted via telephone by a CRU member of staff to ascertain what support is needed, utilising local resources where possible such as the District/Borough Councils, the Community and Voluntary Sector and of course the Social Prescribing Link workers.

## **Supporting people at the highest risk during COVID-19 incident**

During the current pandemic, Social Prescribing Link Workers have been asked to vary their usual activity and work in order to support this GP action: Prioritising support for those patients identified most at high risk and proactively managing a comprehensive medical support package drawing on volunteers and wider services as required to meet their wider needs.

GPs will have been notified of those patients most at risk from infection who are registered with their practice. GPs together with their PCNs assess that this is the case and also take steps to ensure other people who have significant social and emotional needs, but not on the list of people most at risk, can be supported in a way that their condition does not deteriorate and consequently add pressure onto the health service.

Those identified as most at risk may be linked to their social prescribing link worker.

The national brief states the responsibilities of social prescribing link workers as:

To work with the most frail people identified by GP practices, these may include the shielded and protected also.

Main responsibilities:

- To make initial contact with the person on the identified list via telephone or video appointments

- To discuss their needs, such as help with shopping, medication, keeping physically active and emotional support
- To work with the patient to develop a short plan which covers their practical, physical and emotional needs
- In partnership with known voluntary organisations, local authority and appropriately trained volunteers, organising practical and emotional support for people at highest risk
- Arranging follow-up phone calls as needed, to review needs and to help coordinate services that support the most at risk in their homes.

### **Mobilise local community networks to support those most at risk**

The responsibilities of social prescribing link workers would be:

- to co-ordinate with VCSE organisations, local authority, NHS volunteer responders, community groups and other partners to work together to implement the person's plan to support voluntary organisations and community groups to switch their face to- face activities to virtual services, helping them to run peer support groups, via teleconference and social media
- to support local public health team in training volunteers and community groups to keep themselves and others safe in relation to COVID-19.

### **Increasing social prescribing link work capacity**

There are a number of steps that GPs and their PCNs can take to increase the number of social prescribing link workers:

- draw down on the Additional Roles Reimbursement Scheme to recruit a team (for example, four) of social prescribing link workers
- work in partnership with VCSE organisations to recruit and deploy social prescribing link workers (or equivalent named person co-ordinating care).

In Derby and Derbyshire some of these actions are already undertaken by others within the system. For example;

- in some areas shielded people have been contacted by Local Authority staff or Care Co-ordinators and their needs for support with medication, supplies and physical and emotional needs have been discussed and actioned
- Strong existing links community networks are already in place, underpinned by commissioned VCS Infrastructure services, and have mobilised to meet this new need
- Commissioners have worked pro-actively with commissioned VCSE organisations to ensure services have switched to become virtual

As parts of the brief are already met in part or as a whole, The Local Resilience Forum who are leading the community response request that the SPLWs are supported by their PCNs to work co-operatively with the other statutory and voluntary services that comprise the community response, especially Public Health and VCS Infrastructure services, to help provide a whole system response. Working in co-operation will allow SPLW to concentrate their time on elements of the brief that are

not met elsewhere, avoiding duplication and using their high level of skill most effectively.

We recognise there may well be variation within the SPLW across the county and city which reflects the differences we have across places and PCNs.