



## **The future of WCN - vision and future direction**

### **1. Vision**

There is strong support across the community for WCN continuing in some form (85% from the quantitative survey said yes to 'should the service continue?').

WCN is recognised as a high profile co-operative network of organisations which provides both direct support and information to the local community and service organisations (online, phone, face to face), as well as signposting to other service organisations whenever appropriate.

There is a strong desire for WCN to be locally focused but at the same engage with the full range of existing organisations (both local and Somerset - wide) in order both to help to facilitate/foster joined up thinking and to avoid unnecessary duplication of services. Specifically, WCN needs to continue to develop and nurture a good relationship with Wells City, Mendip District and Somerset County Council. It is felt to be essential that WCN remains apolitical.

It will be important to agree upfront the scope of WCN. The research indicates that the remit should be very broad in terms of age, socio-economic grouping, ethnicity and gender in order to facilitate the maximum amount of cross fertilization of ideas across and within the community, hence consolidating WCN's positioning as an umbrella hub rather than restricting its focus to, for example, the old and vulnerable. It is only by taking this broad, cooperative, diverse and truly inclusive approach that the development of enduring community spirit can take place.

### **2. Current services**

The PhoneLine is perceived to have been absolutely core to the service so far. It has a large number of benefits currently perceived to be absent in the community:

- Locally based, focused on Wells and nearby
- Manned by, often familiar, local people which provides a critical sense of continuity and reassurance
- Means that those who are less internet confident have a quick and easy means of communication
- Provides the opportunity to direct users to the best service(s) for them, an initial single point of access.

Many service organisations have benefited from the communication channels that WCN have opened up between organisations as a means of providing mutual support, idea generation and creation of joint projects.

WCN has provided a specific set of services during Covid and these have been universally applauded e.g. prescription collection service, food delivery, checking on neighbours. There is a lot of discussion relating to how this will / could evolve going forward and the role of WCN / other service organisations within this.

### **3. Future ideas**

All of the potential ideas were well received.

The two most popular ideas by a clear margin were:

- 'Local organisations working together so that each individual gets all the help they need from one contact' (This idea came top and really manifests the essence of what WCN should be all about)
- 'A co-ordinated volunteer network so that volunteers can be matched with individual needs more effectively' was also very popular although there was some discussion regarding how 'matching' would be executed and the role of WCN (versus other service organisations) within this. It was considered essential that WCN sticks within its area of expertise, for example organisations working with vulnerable people would like to be introduced to potential volunteers but would like ultimate selection and training to be left to them. Equally some felt they would like to be made aware of the options rather than being 'matched'. There was also a strong feeling that any network should be properly coordinated with Spark.

'Shared community resources' and 'creating community events and activities to build community relations' were both very popular and felt to be a natural manifestation of the network.

'Supporting initiatives that boost the local economy' was popular and would arguably have done even better given a different sample base (this sample was skewed older).

'Continue with current services' was probably chosen by those already using the service. There was a consistent expectation that these would be evolved going forward.

'More promotion and referrals' was arguably implicit in the WCN offer and not considered an additional service.

'Community enterprise network' was interpreted as WCN deciding to focus on, and support , specific projects. This was perceived to be the remit of Project Factory/Wake Up Wells by those who were already aware of this organisation.

'Physical hub' was considered important by some but there was also some resistance to WCN having premises since it was felt this would involve unnecessary cost as well as there being a strong feeling that WCN should be using pre-existing space, for example Heads UP or the Connect Centre etc, particularly at a time when these organisations were struggling financially and were looking for every opportunity to rent space out.

'Ward level forum' was felt to be a good idea by some although there were concerns about the logistics/confidentiality of these as well as the need to ensure neutrality on political issues.

'Collective community group buying power' was liked albeit not felt to be core to WCN.