

Hawkhurst Parish Council
HAWKHURST COMMUNITY SUPPORT GROUP
CLOSURE ARRANGEMENTS



To all HCSG Volunteers

HCSG was established in March 2020, in response to the first Covid lockdown, to assist Hawkhurst residents who required assistance during the pandemic by collecting and delivering groceries, prescription medicines and essential supplies.

The Group achieved those objectives and more. At the peak of its operations HCSG volunteers served 140 clients with a dedicated volunteer force of 190 people. As well as shopping etc. the Group delivered a number of additional community services including dog walking and a phone buddy line. We also arranged free deliveries of applies, Easter eggs and fresh vegetables and ran a children's art competition. In April last year we established the Food4Families project (F4F) to provide food and household essentials to some of the most deprived families in the community. F4F has operated on a weekly basis since then.

We have been very successful in raising funds to support these initiatives. Through the generosity of local people and businesses we raised more than £12,000 over the course of the year. And the Group has established some very effective new channels of communication to support the community, including a comprehensive community Website and a periodic newsletter.

Since achieving a peak of activity during the first lockdown, demand for HCSG's shopping etc. services has declined. Demand for F4F has, in contrast, been increasing, so that now 36 households, are using the service. However, it costs £200 - £300 per week to run and, although alternative sources of supply have been exploited to make available funds stretch further, HCSG's remaining cash reserves are running out.

HCSG was designed to be a temporary organisation, subsisting only for the duration of the Covid crisis. Those who planned and managed the operation did not design it as a permanent community institution and neither they, nor the other volunteers, were asked to make an indefinite commitment to it. So, now that we are on the road out of lockdown, we are planning to wind up HCSG's operations.

Accordingly, following consultation with our members, we have decided to wind up HCSG's operations with effect from Thursday 13th May 2021. With this note we set out how we are planning to achieve this, and ask for your help in ensuring that no-one who still needs help is overlooked.

Before getting into the detail I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks, on behalf of the whole Hawkhurst community, to every one of our volunteers. It has been an uplifting experience to see how willingly and generously the community has responded to support those in need during the crisis. Thank you all.

Clare Escombe
Chair HCSG

7 April 2021

CLOSURE PLAN

HCSG will cease operations at midnight on 13th May 2021. This is just before the start of Stage 3 of the Government's relaxation of lockdown restrictions on 17th May, and is the date on which the Group's third party liability insurance expires. Ceasing operations on that date will enable us to make better use of the money which would otherwise have to be spent on renewing the policy.

From 14th May, HCSG's central management infrastructure will be dismantled, the telephone helpline and the HCSG email account will be closed and the Group's bank account terminated.

The Food 4 Families scheme will continue beyond 14th May as a separate operation for as long as remaining funds allow.

From now on, no new clients or volunteers will be recruited. From 14th May, volunteers carrying out shopping, collecting prescriptions and walking dogs will no longer be managed by HCSG, operating through the area leader structure.

We appreciate, however, that the Group's services continue to be valued by many in the community, with 62 clients remaining on our books for those services. Many of these clients - elderly people with mobility problems, for example - would now find it hard to live without these services and we would not want to abandon them without establishing successor arrangements wherever possible.

Consequently, we first need to establish how many of our existing volunteers, having looked after their clients so kindly, would be prepared to carry on looking after those who continue to need support. Without the organisational infrastructure, their work would be carried out in a personal capacity.

Where existing volunteers wished to step down, but their clients remained in need of support, we might be able to find other volunteers on our books prepared to take over before the closing date. Where we cannot match an existing client to a volunteer, and this would cause real difficulty, we shall explore with the client the possibility of relying on friends or family.

What we would like you to do

To enable us to withdraw our services in good order and without causing unnecessary inconvenience to our clients, we would be grateful if you would take the following action:

Shopping/dog walking volunteers currently serving clients

1. Please notify your clients of the impending closure of HCSG;
2. If you are prepared to continue serving your clients, let them know that, in future, you will be acting in a personal capacity and that services will no longer be provided by HCSG;
3. If you wish to take this opportunity to withdraw from your commitment, please establish with your clients whether they have a continuing need for shopping/dog walking services. If so, tell them that we shall try to find a replacement volunteer before the Group closes;
4. Please provide your area leader with the following information by 15th April at the latest:
 - a) Which client(s) you are currently actively serving;
 - b) Whether you intend to continue serving those clients;
 - c) If you wish to withdraw, whether the client needs a replacement or can manage without a volunteer in future.

Area Leaders

On receiving reports from your volunteers:

1. Please identify any clients in continuing need whose volunteer is planning to stand down, and see whether you can find a replacement volunteer from your area volunteer list; then

2. Provide the following information to the Co-ordination Group by email to hawkhurstcommunity@gmail.com by 23 April at the latest:
 - a) Names of clients currently being served;
 - b) Clients who will continue to be served by existing volunteers;
 - c) Any new client/volunteer pairings you have arranged;
 - d) Clients who no longer require service;
 - e) Details of any clients needing continued service who cannot be paired within the area.

The Volunteer and Client Managers will then try to find alternative ways of meeting the client's needs.

Food 4 Families

As stated above, the Food 4 Families scheme will continue beyond 14th May for as long as remaining funds allow.

We are currently researching alternative means of supporting and advising families in need when F4F closes. Guidance will be issued to client families before the service is withdrawn.

Other issues

We are hoping that it will be possible to retain the HCSG Website as a community resource. A great deal of work has been invested in the Website so that it now provides a valuable directory of local services and useful information. It could provide a viable successor to the Hawkhurst Newsletter: easier and less expensive to maintain¹. However, it would be necessary to find a suitable person to act as Editor, and perhaps a small team of people to support them. We shall advertise in social media but, if you know of anyone who might be interested in one of these roles, please encourage them to get in touch with us.

Contingency planning and your data

We all, of course, hope that there will be no future resurgence of the crisis. But we cannot rule out the possibility of future lockdowns and the consequent need to re-establish HCSG. It took an enormous amount of work to get the operation up and running and the prospect of starting again from scratch is daunting. We are, therefore, planning to create a structured repository of essential records and expertise to be held in safe keeping so that HCSG could again be mobilised at short notice if necessary.

The repository will include all of our administrative documentation and guidance together with the following information about our volunteers:

- a) Name, address and other contact details
- b) Dates of service with HCSG
- c) Areas to which volunteers were assigned
- d) A copy of each volunteer's ID card
- e) The volunteer's communication preferences (where known).

And the following information about our clients:

- a) Name, address and other contact details
- b) Areas to which clients were assigned.

¹ Web hosting and domain name subscriptions have been paid until Spring 2022.

This information will be held on removable media by the Parish Council, with access restricted to the Chair and Clerk.

We are hoping that this will not cause any concern but you have the right, at any time, to request that your personal details be removed from our repository, and this will be done. Simply email the Clerk at parish.clerk@hawkhurst-pc.gov.uk.

HCSG

hawkhurstcommunity@gmail.com