

Service Review: The Community Hub, Welshpool

Carried out between January 2025 and November 2025

Reviewers: Cllr Alison Davies, Cllr Morag Bailey on behalf of the Audit Committee

1. Introduction

The Community Hub, formerly the Warm Hub was set up in October 2023 by the then Mayor Cllr Nick Howells, supported by the Mayor and Town Clerk's PA, in response to the significant increases in fuel costs and the cost of living, and the impact that was having on those on low incomes.

It was agreed that due to the nature of the heating system at the Town Hall it would be appropriate to utilise the Town Hall, particularly the Assembly Rooms as they were already heated and therefore minimal additional cost to the Town Council's budget.

It initially started with just a hot or cold drink and biscuits at no charge but inviting donations. It started slowly as word got around. It was then agreed that the service would provide a limited range of hot food but there was no budget to purchase equipment to do so.

Cllr Howells used his own skills and the good offices of the position of Mayor to ask for donations of equipment and was very successful, receiving microwaves, toasters and other utensils and equipment to expand the service.

To keep the service a low risk in food production no meat products, rice or other high-risk foods are used and the service received a 4-star food hygiene rating. It has not applied for a 5-star rating.

The days and times of opening have been co-ordinated to avoid other key service delivery and community services in Welshpool; it operates on a Tuesday and Thursday morning between 10am and 2pm between October and March, and Thursdays between April and September.

Food available includes:-

Tea, coffee, squash, water, biscuits

Soup, sandwiches, toasties, baked potatoes and on occasions, cakes.

The service has at least one Town Councillor on duty at all times who acts as the Responsible Officer. Originally this was either Cllr Howells or the Mayor's PA, or Cllr Davies on Tuesday from 1pm, but since Oct 2024 Cllr Bailey has supported Cllr Howells to share the duties. Cllr Rowell also regularly volunteers.

Cllr Howells does the shopping for the Hub on a Monday and Wednesday. Cllr Howells and Cllr Bailey do the food preparation, supported by trained volunteers. All have passed the Level 2 Food Hygiene Certificate which is an essential requirement for role.

Baked Potatoes are cooked at the Meals on Wheels kitchen by Town Council staff there as the ovens are already in use so minimal additional costs.

2. Funding

The main funding of the scheme is through donations from service users, community organisations, business organisations, grant applications or bequests.

The service is successfully manned by volunteers although initially supported by the Mayor's PA for approximately 7 hours per week in the winter and 3 hours in summer, this included managing the volunteer provision, donations, providing information for the service and providing online communication and publicity. This reduced significantly when this post ended in Feb 2025 and since this time has reduced to 1-2 hours a week of staff time.

The Town Council has provided a budget of £500 per year but this has not needed to be utilised. The table below demonstrates the income and expenditure to date: -

	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Income - Donations	£1,915.00	£1,899.64	£2,067.00	£590.82
Warm Hub Expenditure	£142.64	£541.28	£309.53	£205.11
Net Exp	(£1,772.36)	(£1,358.36)	(£1,757.47)	(£385.71)

Donations taken at the Hub are recorded by Town Council staff and stored securely. The Council agreed in April 2025 that the Hub should have a separate bank account and debit card. However while there is evidence of Council approving the setup of the bank account to the Town Clerk and RFO, it is unclear whether delegated authority for councillors who run the Hub to commit expenditure through using the card has been agreed by Council.

Prior to the introduction of the bank card, the monies spent on the Hub was taken directly out of the cash donations received, causing administrative overheads and potential risks around cash. Since moving to the debit card in October, all donations are now banked (rather than being stored securely) and the card is reconciled monthly against receipts provided and forms part of the Council's cashbook accounting system.

Volunteers are entitled to claim for parking/bus travel expenses, this is minimal and is paid for from the donations. Emergency purchases are also made this way. Many volunteers do not ask for re-imbursement and class it as their contribution.

The balance on the Hub's bank account is currently £2357.16 due to recent larger donations which were held over as liabilities in the Council's accounts since inception of the Hub. Some of this will be used to purchase some lockable cupboards in which to store some of the Hub's equipment and consumables.

While the Hub mainly operates from the Assembly Rooms, should there be a booking, the Hub is held in the Corn Exchange with a limited menu. Should both be booked, then the Hub is not held. This ensures no revenue is lost to the Town Council.

In short the Hub is self-sufficient, using minimal Town Council resources, such as cooking costs. However, it is reliant on receiving donations to continue.

3. Current

The original purpose of the Hub was a place for people to go to keep warm and meet people and it served its purpose at the time. Responding to the needs of the community it has developed into a vibrant Community Hub. In addition to being a warm space it has become a general community meeting point, which also goes a little way to helping the community address the current cost of living crisis.

What is of note is that since Oct 2025 the numbers of attendees has increased with some session having more than 70 people attending. This is in some part due to a number of disabled clients and their carers attending on a Thursday.

Numbers of people attending: -

Year	Attendees	Year	Attendees	Year	Attendees
2023	2700	2024	3252	2025 to Nov	2406 Approx

Number of meals provided:

The number of meals provided ranges from between 15 – 30 meals during the summer months and in the winter months between 20 – 35 meals a day. The increasing attendees this winter has seen an increase in range from 20 to 50 or 60 meals a session.

The variety of food offered is suitable for the current catering facilities and volunteer capacity.

The Hub provides an opportunity for local agencies to offer one to one, face to face drop-in sessions easily accessible to the community, and these have been taken up by CAB, Water Companies, PCC Housing and recycling departments, PAVO, DWP, Police amongst others.

It is noted that when sessions are held in the Corn Exchange numbers are often higher. It appears that this location may be more suited to attracting Hub users, however catering and disabled toilet facilities are more limited.

Volunteers

There are currently 15 active volunteers who help to deliver the service. The average number of volunteers at each session is 9 with a range between 7 and 12.

The volunteer roles include: -

- Food preparation. This requires a Level 2 Food Hygiene Certificate
- Washing up
- Kitchen Cleaning
- Tea and Coffee making
- Waiting on tables
- Liaison with clients
- Setting up and putting away before and after sessions
- Record keeping
- Generally providing a warm and friendly environment

Several current volunteers have disabilities themselves and therefore choose roles that they can manage.

There has been a slow turnover of volunteers, and it is anticipated that this will continue. The Hub has also been successful in recruiting new volunteers on an ongoing basis.

Consultation

As part of the review service users were consulted on a range of areas during October 2025. The main findings are below:-

- There is a balance between male and female attendees.
- The majority of attendees live in Welshpool but some travel in from surrounding villages.
- The majority of attendees are 50+.
- Most people who completed the survey had been attending for some time but there were also a number of new or even first-time attendees.
- Most people were drawn in by the advert at the front of the building
- The most popular reasons for attending (top 3)
 - To have a drink and a chat
 - The friendly welcoming environment
 - To meet other people
- Everyone liked that donations were invited rather than a fixed price charging system.
- The provision of hot food was important to many, but not as important as the top 3 above.

Appendix A contains the full results of the consultation.

4. Conclusions

Cllr Nick Howells is rightly proud of having created a highly successful Town Council community service which is providing a warm and welcoming community hub for the Welshpool area, that continues to develop and is valued by its service users.

His community liaison has attracted significant donations and grants from the private, public and commercial sectors and very welcome positive PR for the Town Council.

The Hub offers a range of volunteering opportunities, in various roles that utilise diverse skills and interests.

Volunteers have contributed to the success of this highly valued service through the delivery of a warm welcome and spirit of generosity to whoever comes through the door.

Cllr Howell's skill set and local knowledge have been fundamental to the development of this Town Council Service which goes from strength to strength.

5. Opportunities

- The food available is limited by the catering facilities available, however, the Town Hall Transformation project will create modern more appropriate facilities, and more easily accessible catering facilities particularly the provision of ground floor facilities.
- The integration of the Community Fridge as part of the Council's community service.
- Strengthen the link between the Hub and the TC through the recently completed staffing structure review, providing co-ordinated support to volunteers and improved record keeping.
- Include specific reporting on the Hub in line with other service areas
- Develop further advisory agency involvement
- Introduce formal Town Councillor drop in sessions

6. Risks

- Transfer of management of the Meals on Wheels Service in the future should they continue to provide the baked potatoes, it is likely that there will be a charge.
- Sustainability of the Service post Councillor elections in 2027
- Donations dry up
- Disruption to service caused during Town Hall Transformation programme
- Volunteers: Loss of volunteers, unable to recruit new volunteers into the pipeline, loss of experience through retirements/ill health
- Negative publicity. PR not following WTC Communications policy
- Delegated authority for the Hub to manage its own account needs clarifying.

7. Recommendations

- a. Develop the 'Responsible Person' role to include trained non-councillors
- b. Provide alternative to Meals on Wheels staff baking potatoes by use of a suitable oven on the premises.
- c. Continue to apply for grants to develop the service
- d. Continue to positively publicise the service. All PR must follow Town Council Communications Policy.
- e. Include support to the Hub with one of the Community roles as part of the new staffing structure.
- f. Include information reports on the Hub on Operations Committee
Agendas, similar reporting to Meals on Wheels, Flick in the Sticks and TIC.
- g. Clarify the delegated authority for the Hub banking account ensuring compliance with Financial Standing Orders.

Appendix A: Consultation results

Some written comments were offered, they are set out below:

- Excellent events
- Good volunteers
- Good catering by kitchen
- More disability spaces for parking
- Removal of horrid phone box from the main street (near Greggs)







