

WARM HUBS

Connecting communities
throughout Warwickshire & Solihull

WINTER WARM HUBS 2023-24 ORGANISER'S CHECKLIST



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Connecting communities throughout Warwickshire & Solihull

1. Introduction

This Organiser's Checklist is a guide to helping you set up a Winter Warm Hub for your community. WRCC has been running the Warm Hubs project since December 2020, with support from gas distribution network Cadent. In Winter 2022-23, the increase in cost of living (including energy costs) combined with the ongoing impact of Covid-related isolation, led to WRCC introducing Winter Warm Hub funding. We wanted to help more community groups help more residents more quickly during this difficult time. WRCC also realised that more training and support could be helpful, and has included this for hubs in 2023-24

Last year this funding helped to support a network of 92 Winter Warm Hubs running in Warwickshire and Solihull (between October 2022 - March 2023). During that period, 27,612 visits by residents were made to 1,683 events. WRCC distributed 928 energy, home safety and cost of living packs plus free carbon monoxide alarms. An overwhelming 95% of hub organisers who responded to our post event survey (88% of all organisers responded) wanted to carry on some form of community activity.

40% of these hubs would not have been able to run at all without Winter Warm Hub funding (up to a maximum of £500 per community hub) and the remaining 60% would have had to limit their offering or charge for attendance. The hard work done by organisers and their teams of volunteers running these hubs meant WRCC's allocation of Winter Warm Hubs funding (thanks to Cadent's ongoing support of the project and a later contribution from Warwickshire County Council) was able to help make a difference to many residents.

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WRCC, Warwick University - Wellesbourne Campus, Wellesbourne, Warwick CV35 9EF
www.wrccrural.org.uk 01789 842182

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97% of organisers felt wellbeing had improved for attendees (the remaining 3% said it was difficult to evaluate due to low attendance) and 69% said they had helped to provide support with cost of living problems. Nearly two thirds thought their event had had a significant impact overall for people attending, and a similar amount felt there was an impact upon the wider community as well, which can be attributed to the “ripple effect” of attendees taking information away and sharing this with others.

Organisations attending hubs included Act on Energy, Citizens Advice, Family Information Services, The British Motor Museum (with their very popular Memory Boxes), Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service, Warwickshire Healthwatch, Library Service, Warwickshire Wildlife Trust and many more.

There was a wide range of refreshments on offer, with the vast majority (over 90%) providing these for free, although some allowed people to make donations if they preferred to do so. Those who charged did so at a nominal rate to make events affordable and inclusive, and organisers advised that these would have been waived for vulnerable people unable to pay.

Activities also ranged widely, from those aimed at young babies to young at heart residents in their 90s. The most popular activities were board games and puzzles, followed by reading books, magazines and papers, children’s activities and arts and crafts. Indoor exercise and sports were also enjoyed, including table tennis, slow mat bowls and indoor curling. Plus popular bingo and quizzes!

Many residents found these hubs to be a lifeline, with comments such as “I like meeting people, doing craft work and it’s a warm place in the winter months” and “it’s a reason to get up in the morning”. Volunteers also felt they benefitted from their involvement. It gave a lot of people back their social confidence which they had lost since Covid - “I don’t feel so alone” - and it helped people to build trust and ask for help with problems, whether relating to energy debt, access to affordable food, or many other issues.

Our favourite description of these hubs came from a Bidford resident who called their hub their “happy place”. The warmth of welcome, social interaction and additional support provided by a Winter Warm Hub is needed all year round, in WRCC’s view, and therefore at the end of the Winter Warm Hubs period, hubs meeting the necessary criteria can apply for free membership of WRCC’s accredited permanent Warm Hubs network.

In the meantime, as we head into another potentially difficult winter, WRCC is launching a new programme of Winter Warm Hubs funding. We encourage community groups in Warwickshire and Solihull to engage with this initiative and to help provide further support to residents during Winter 2023-24.

2. What is a Winter Warm Hub?

A Winter Warm Hub is a hub which receives funding or support from WRCC's WRCC's Winter Warm Hub funding programme, and which is accredited by WRCC to describe itself in this way for a limited period of time, such as October 2023 - March 2024.

It should follow the same principles as a permanent WRCC accredited Warm Hub, ie be a safe, warm and welcoming place where people can meet regularly. It is held in an accessible venue, such as a community centre, village or church hall, or any other building which may be used by residents.

A Winter Warm Hub provides hot drinks and refreshments. This could be as simple as coffee, tea, biscuits or cakes, or might be a hot snack or a cooked meal, such as a monthly breakfast or weekly lunch club.

A Winter Warm Hub helps reduce loneliness and isolation and provides another means to check in with vulnerable people in a community. It may be especially helpful for people who find it hard to stay warm due to inadequate heating at home or high energy costs.

A Winter Warm Hub provides users with information about energy efficiency, cost saving measures and behavioural changes, as well as home safety. It also helps signpost users to other services that can offer support. Informal visits from relevant support organisations are encouraged.

A Winter Warm Hub is community-led and runs on a not-for-profit basis by a community group or organisation.

Everyone attending a Winter Warm Hub - organisers, other volunteers and attendees - is treated with kindness, respect and dignity.

There is a lot of flexibility with the Winter Warm Hubs model! Whether you want to run a coffee morning or a breakfast/lunch club, an event supporting young parents or a residents' association, a repair cafe or a cooking group, an after-school club or a seated exercise class ... or something else. It's up to you to choose an activity that meets your community's needs.

3. Winter Warm Hub refreshments & activities

People should be offered hot refreshments at any Winter Warm Hub. This can be as simple as tea, coffee, pre-packed biscuits/cakes in a community café setting.

Basic refreshments would ideally be free. You may be able to collaborate with local shops or supermarkets that can provide free or reduced-cost supplies. If resources do not stretch this far, donations may be requested, or a nominal entrance charge made (we recommend no more than £1.00) to cover your reasonable cost. However, if someone cannot afford to pay such a charge, they should not be prevented from attending.

More groups are becoming interested in providing a hot snack or cooked meal for attendees. If this is something you want to do and you need to charge to cover your reasonable costs, consider whether this is likely to deter people from being able to attend the Warm Hub.

Please note that even if you are providing food for free and not “selling” it to attendees, your group may still need to register with your local authority as a food business, if you provide food on a regular and organised basis. Although there is no strict definition of what this means, if you are only providing “low risk” refreshments such as hot drinks, pre-packed biscuits and pre-packed cakes (dry food) you are unlikely to need to register.

Also, if you are handling, preparing, storing and serving food occasionally and on a small scale, you are unlikely to need to register. However, if you will be running regular weekly or monthly events instead over time (even if these will not be run permanently) you are likely to need to register as a food business. More information is available from the Food Standards Agency:
www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/getting-ready-to-start-your-food-business
www.food.gov.uk/safety-hygiene/providing-food-at-community-and-charity-events

This does not need to be a complex process and it is of course important to have appropriate protections in place for hub attendees. Best practice is to contact your local Environmental Health team to get the necessary advice for your event:

www.warwickshire.gov.uk/trading-standards-business-advice/food-safety-standards-advice/3

<https://www.solihull.gov.uk/environment-and-animals/food-safety-businesses>

If you are planning to offer prepared food, you must ensure that you provide Level 2 Food Hygiene for anyone preparing or handling food. Some free training is available as part of the additional support for funding in 2023-2024 - please refer to the application form for more information.

Information about managing energy and other costs and details of external support organisations should be available at Winter Warm Hubs. However, this should be on a "light touch"/informal basis and attendees should not feel such advice is being forced upon them.

As already mentioned, Winter Warm Hubs can play a proactive role in signposting attendees to other support services and organisations who may be able to attend on certain days to support residents, e.g. Act on Energy, Mobile library Service, NHS prescribers, Citizens Advice advisers, etc. And the hub can play a role in bringing together local community support groups as well - again, focus on your community's needs and also collaborate with other hubs to share experiences and get practical tips and advice.

There are a huge range of activities already being offered by WRCC accredited Warm Hubs, and you can find out where these hubs are at www.wrccrural.org.uk/warm-hubs-network. You can also ask WRCC to put you in contact with other hubs in the network, who would be willing to share their experiences and perhaps arrange for you to visit one of their events. Many examples of popular activities have already been mentioned in the Introduction to this Checklist.

If you want to focus on specific activities for your Winter Warm Hub, such as repair clubs, healthy cooking, exercise groups or activities for children, you should consider relevant training and safeguarding requirements. Further information is available from WRCC and also from Halls Together (see below).

Again, free online training in areas such as Risk Management, Safeguarding, Volunteer Management and Training, etc can be accessed to support your community group. Please refer to the Winter Warm Hubs application form for more information.

4. Choosing a Winter Warm Hub venue

A Winter Warm Hub must provide attendees with a warm, safe, welcoming and easily accessible room or space in a hall, community centre or other building.

If you are using your own community centre, village hall, or other space, then you should already have risk assessments and other arrangements in place.

Village halls and community centres can get further support from [Halls Together](#) which is run in partnership by WRCC and Leicestershire & Rutland RCC.

Available membership resources include access to assessments, safeguarding, insurance, hiring conditions and VAT on energy costs, plus more. You can also join Halls Together's Facebook group.

If you are a community group hiring a space, carefully study the venue's hiring conditions. These will describe limits on numbers and may restrict certain activities or require hirers to have other arrangements in place. The venue's insurance policy may cover you, but check this beforehand.

If you are running any event, you must consider health and safety issues and should also complete a risk assessment (if you don't have one, you could access free support - see Winter Warm Hubs application form). Check how accessible the room is for people with mobility issues. How many people are likely to attend and can the space accommodate these numbers?

Also, find out what other events may be running at the same time - this is another reason for collaborating with other hubs and community groups in your area, so you are not competing with others for attendees and restricting their opportunities to attend more social events.

Consider how people can get to the Warm Hub. Is parking available and whether there is reliable local transport. Are people able to car-share, or could you book a community transport service to help residents attend?

5. Organising & running a Winter Warm Hub

Someone will of course need to be responsible for running the Warm Hub. This could be volunteers or paid staff, or a combination of both. Volunteers should have a role description and paid staff, a job description. Halls can get more information about recruiting volunteers or managing volunteers and paid staff from Halls Together.

Volunteers or paid staff should receive any training necessary to carry out their work. Training can be “on the job” or a more formal training course. Warwickshire & Solihull CAVA and others regularly provide training for the voluntary and community sector. Again, refer to the Winter Warm Hubs application form for access to free online training and contact WRCC if you have further questions or need more advice.

All volunteers and paid staff should be made aware of the health and safety arrangements, including the content of the risk assessment. You should also consider safeguarding and, if you are dealing with vulnerable adults or children and young people, you should consider having staff and volunteers DBS checked (see above).

Warwickshire & Solihull CAVA offer support to the voluntary and community sector. In particular, they can provide funding, volunteering and governance advice, and also have a widely distributed newsletter, eGrapevine.

Finally, you will need to produce a budget for the Warm Hub activity. Be realistic about your costs and include hall hire, refreshments and any additional event support you wish to provide. And explore a range of funding options including WRCC’s Winter Warm Hubs grant.

6. Encouraging people to come to your hub

Ensure your target community is aware of your new Winter Warm Hub. Word of mouth is the best (and cheapest) option and involving local people in your plans early usually pays dividends later. It is worth thinking about other tools to let people know what you are doing and how they can access the Warm Hub.

If your community has a Facebook or other online group, make sure you post details there and any other relevant social media. If you have a local parish or church magazine, this often has excellent reach. And don't forget leaflets and noticeboards in the community. You can also send information to your local newspaper and radio stations, including community radio.

WRCC can provide free online training on Promoting your Hub (see Winter Warm Hubs application form) and can also offer informal advice on promoting your event. Consider how you might reach the people most isolated or likely to struggle with loneliness, isolation, access to fresh food or heating their home. Sometimes a friendly, direct invitation is all that is needed!

Special events might also act as great publicity and a good reason for people to get involved. Could you put on a subsidised opening lunch, show a sporting event or arrange a talk from someone about a local issue? Your town or parish council may be keen to support initiatives that keep people safe and warm during the winter, and it may be worth involving them in the development of your plans.

Anyone searching online for a Winter Warm Hub or Warm Hub activity will also be able to find their local hub (and other local events) via our online map at www.wrccrural.org.uk/warm-hubs-network

And finally...

There is certainly a lot to think about, especially if you are setting up a brand new event, but the important thing is to focus on the benefit to your local community. At the end of the day, Warm Hubs and Winter Warm Hubs have an important role as “happy places” that provide people with a safe community space and a much needed sense of belonging, as well as being able to provide practical support and guidance to those who may be struggling for various reasons. And you are not alone - our team is here to help!

You can find more information about the Warm Hubs project at www.wrccrural.org.uk/wrcc-warm-hubs and you can also email our team at warmhubs@wrccrural.org.uk.



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