

The VETS and Defibrillator Training

The VETS

When the defibrillator was installed in 2017 the Parish Council also signed up to the VETS.

VETS stands for "Village Emergency Telephone System" and is a community-run system which requires a minimum of 10 volunteers to assist in the event of a cardiac arrest, pending the arrival of emergency services. The system uses a telephone number which is unique for the village.

It's important to note that the VETS does not replace 999 calls. 999 ambulance must always be called in the first instance.

When the unique VETS number is dialled the caller is played a simple message before a VETS volunteers answers. The volunteer collects and brings the defibrillator to the patient, and assists in CPR. If there is no answer on the VETS the caller should continue with CPR as instructed via the 999 call.

The VETS can also be used for any emergency where additional help is required from neighbours, whether cardiac arrest or not.

The Community Heartbeat Trust (CHT) has confirmed the VETS telephone number was called in Greywell several times in 2019, and once in 2020 and 2021. We don't know if these calls were a request for help or someone checking the service was still working.

Membership to the VETS is provided by the CHT at an annual cost of £100, the CHT has confirmed that if the service were to be reinstated in Greywell there will be no installation costs

Due to limited funds and a lack of volunteers, the Parish Council made the decision to suspend the VETS service in November 2023, pending a gathering of detailed information regarding the scheme.

Considerations

- In a small village it can be challenging to recruit and maintain the required number of volunteers to make the scheme a) work and b) be viable
- The VETS system relies on volunteers being close at hand in order to be able to fetch a defibrillator quickly
- Whilst mobile numbers can be registered under the VETS scheme the recommendation is to have a blend of landlines and mobiles, as routing to a lot of mobile phones can cause delays in the call being sent around
- Other Parish Clerks have suggested that the ambulance service doesn't support VETS. I can't find anything which confirms this but when I contacted the South Central Ambulance Charity they had never heard of VETS
- On the Facebook page for the Community Clerks Network I asked if their councils were members of the VETS scheme, out of 2.1k members no one responded that they use the service
- Membership to the VETS would be an additional yearly cost to the village
- Whilst training of volunteers in the use of the defibrillator and CPR isn't a legal requirement, if the Parish Council are to provide the VETS training may install confidence in volunteers. This would be at a further cost to the village
- When the VETS was implemented in 2017 training wasn't offered
- Volunteers are likely to come and go. Meaning training (if provided) would need to be repeated
- Can be used for emergencies other than cardiac arrests where neighbours' assistance is beneficial
- Volunteers from within the village can improve community spirit and support
- The VETS isn't a necessity, the defibrillator remains in use
- When you call 999 the ambulance service operator will stay on the telephone to assist

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Defibrillator Training

There is no legal requirement to have defibrillator training in the UK. The UK Resuscitation Council guidelines indicate that community defibrillators (AEDs) should be able to be used by members of the public with or without any formal training, the equipment is designed to talk to you, or show you and tell you what to do. You cannot make a mistake when using an AED - just follow the instructions being given.

There are many training courses available both online and in person:

Community Heartbeat Trust offers in a 2hr in-house training session for VETS volunteers at a cost of £175. Their website also provides a free video regarding CPR and how to use a defibrillator.

British Heart Foundation provides an online training video regarding CPR and how to use a defibrillator, this is free of charge

Meon Valley Heartstart offers free (subject to a donation to cover the cost of training materials and other associated costs) 2hr in-house training on Emergency Life Saving Skills

As an alternative, villagers could volunteer with the ambulance service to become community first responders (CFRs).

CFRs assist the Ambulance Service by attending emergency calls in the areas where they live or work. As they are local, they can often reach a potentially life-threatening emergency in the first vital minutes before the ambulance crew can get to the scene. They have a high standard of training which allows them to attend a number of different 999 calls. They also carry their own defibrillator.

There are currently no CFRs based in Greywell but those who currently volunteer from Hook and Odiham cover Greywell.

There is no charge for the training but the volunteer needs to be able to commit to 5 days of training-1 day induction and 4 full weekend days.

All equipment, uniform and training are provided by South Central Ambulance Charity.

Conclusion

- Limited evidence of the VETS effectiveness based on the low number of calls in recent years plus uncertainty as to whether these calls were for actual emergencies or just service checks
- Since the Parish Council announced the VETS would be suspended the Parish Clerk has received no communication from villagers to ask why, or when the service will be reinstated
- Defibrillators are advertised and sold as no training needed to use them
- CPR and other medical training is widely available to members of the public without the need for the Parish Council to provide and organise
- If a villager feels strongly about offering emergency help they could volunteer as a CFR or organise a training session for the village and, if necessary, apply for a grant from the Parish Council to cover costs

Recommendation

Permanently discontinue the VETS and continue with the service of providing and maintaining a defibrillator which is available for all to use without the need for additional training. When the defibrillator needs replacing training in its use and CPR can be re-considered