

Healthy Start Vitamins

To reconsider, as agreed, whether Wroughton Parish Council office and Wroughton Library become a local distribution point for healthy start vitamins

Ultimately, the role of the parish council is to improve the lives of its residents. This report is asking you to improve the lives of some of the most vulnerable residents by agreeing that our office and/ or Wroughton Library can hand out healthy start vitamins to those who are entitled to them.

Six months ago you discussed whether the office could be a distribution point for Healthy Start vitamins. You were unsure and decided not to go ahead at that point, but to reconsider in 6 months time. We now have more information.

What is Healthy Start?

People are eligible for healthy start if they get universal credit and they're more than 10 weeks pregnant or have at least 1 child under 4 years old, and their family's take home pay is £408 per month or less, or they receive child tax credit and their family's annual income is £16,190 or less and they don't get working tax credit.

Anyone who is entitled to a healthy start card can use it to buy:

- plain liquid cow's milk
- fresh, frozen, and tinned fruit and vegetables
- fresh, dried, and tinned pulses
- infant formula milk based on cow's milk

They can also use their card to collect:

- Healthy Start vitamins – these support people during pregnancy and breastfeeding
- vitamin drops for babies and young children – these are suitable from birth to 4 years old.

The card can provide a total saving buying healthy food of £1,200 to a family.

Why Wroughton Parish Council and/ or Wroughton Library?

In many areas, healthy start vitamins are handed out by food cooperatives/ food clubs where anyone who has a healthy start food card can then use the money on their cards to buy healthy food at vastly reduced prices if they're able to access food clubs, at the same time as collecting their free healthy start vitamins. The problems with Wroughton's Food Bank (food collective) being a distributor of healthy start vitamins are:

- it's only open for 2 hours a week (2-4pm Wednesdays) and anyone who is on a low income and working may be unable to access it during that time.
Wroughton Parish Council office is open 9am-3pm (6 core hours every weekday or 30 core hours a week) and is often open from 8am into the early evening. Wroughton Library is open 18 hours a week including 2 late afternoons/ early evenings which are guaranteed to open, as well as 3 hours on a Saturday morning.
I.e: Between the office and the library, we are available for 36 hours a week when we are guaranteed to be open and could hand out the vitamins, plus additional hours. We are also open more hours than the ECC, as there's often no ECC staff on site.
- Those who need healthy start vitamins may live in one of our more rural areas and find it difficult/ too expensive to get the bus to existing distribution point which are in central Swindon, Gorse Hill, Penhill. If Wroughton Parish Council doesn't become a distribution point, there will continue to be NO distribution outlet in Wroughton. This means that someone who wants to take up the vitamin offer (and try to improve their and their child's health) would need to travel into town in order to collect their vitamins. The cost of travel is often more expensive than buying them from a supermarket or pharmacy, which is a barrier for residents to access them.
- They may be eligible for healthy start but not for the food bank, and may find it more stigmatizing to get vitamins from a food bank which they wouldn't otherwise use.
If the office and the library can become distribution points, the Parish Council can help reduce the stigma of accessing healthy start vitamins and healthy start as a whole.

How would it work and what resource would it require?

The Parish Council would NOT need to assess whether or not someone is eligible. That will already have been done. Staff would just ask to see the person's healthy start card, and if they have a card, they would be eligible for the vitamins. All staff have to do would be write down the healthy start card number on a spread sheet and then hand over the vitamins.

This works in a similar way to office and library staff providing vouchers enabling people to access the food bank, when we have to ask a few questions, and record people's names. This is not onerous.

The vitamins take up very little room – please see photo below from South Swindon Parish Council which shows 6 pots of women's vitamins and 10 bottles of drops for babies, in a drawer of their filing cabinet:



WPC office and Wroughton Library were both distribution points for the weighted blue bags when these were being introduced and residents hadn't received theirs. We handed out 100+ over a few months, and they took up far more room than the healthy vitamins starter pack.

FAQs: (responses in blue from SBC)

- How many people ideally would SBC want/ expect to access the vitamins on a weekly basis:
Ideally, we would love everyone eligible for healthy start to be collecting vitamins from a distribution point! As an example of the currently rate, in Q3 23/24 there were 59 bottles of children's/women's vitamins collected across four distribution points, most of these were collected at the community fridge where parents would be going to collect other provisions.
- How often would someone who's entitled be coming to collect them?
Beneficiaries are entitled to one bottle of vitamins every 8 weeks.
- How large are the boxes?
A box of women's vitamins contains 6 bottles of vitamins.
A box of children's vitamins contains 12 bottles of vitamin drops.
A box of each would fit into a shoe box and not take up much space.
- How many boxes would you expect us to hold?
I usually order a box of each at a time when I'm notified that they are due to run out, but this would completely depend on uptake. The vitamins do have a used-by date so we would never want to stock pile at any location.
- Would they be delivered here?
They are ordered into the SBC post room and I would forward on to the Wroughton Parish Council office by post.
- What would be the benefit to Wroughton residents?
This would benefit any pregnant/new mums in Wroughton who are eligible for the healthy start scheme, enabling them to pick up the vitamins within their residential area.

Other parish councils in Swindon are distributors of healthy start vitamins?

I contacted some (not all) parish councils in Swindon to find out if they distributed healthy start vitamins, and if so, how they found it:

- South Swindon: Only recently became a distributor so not handed out any as yet. Received a starter pack.
- Stratton St Margaret: Distribute via their community pantry.
- Central Swindon North: Distribute via Pinetrees Community Centre
- Haydon Wick: Only became a distributor 2 weeks prior to report being written, had not promoted them and not had any uptake at that time. Received a starter pack which contains 12 bottles of drops for babies/ young children, and 6 pots for women, so assume that they will not be expected to distribute many as not received many to hand out.
- West Swindon: Hadn't heard of Healthy Start vitamins but following my query are looking to find out more with a view to becoming a distributor, on the basis they want to help their local community.

The parishes which are distribution points are currently advertised via SBC's cost of living webpage but the NHS has yet to update their webpage with the details of the parish councils which are acting as distribution points.

https://www.swindon.gov.uk/info/20013/benefits_and_swindon_money_matters/1260/help_if_youre_struggling_with_living_costs

For more information:

- <https://www.healthystart.nhs.uk/frequently-asked-questions/vitamin-fags/>
- <https://www.healthystart.nhs.uk/getting-vitamins/>

Recommendation:

Ultimately, the role of the parish council is to improve the lives of its residents, and therefore the recommendation is that you support some of the most vulnerable residents in your Parish and help them to become more healthy and improve their and their children's lives and opportunities, by agreeing that the office and the library become a local distribution point for Healthy Start Vitamins.