



Covid and Community Response entry from Marlow FM

To keep serving the Marlow community, we had to radically rethink what we did and how we did it after the Covid outbreak

- We replaced our yearly *Hidden Gems* awards with the *Hidden Heroes* awards, recognising 15 people and organisations who had been doing so much to help others during the pandemic.
- We gave out all the latest information on opening times and delivery services, and interviewed those in charge of running local medical centres and Covid vaccination centres to get to the bottom of rumours circulating on social media.
- We broadcast *Marlow's Quiet Night In*, a special two-hour live event organised along with local company Brand Events and Marlow chef Tom Kerridge to raise money for Tom's Meals from Marlow operation. One of our own volunteers, Amelia Slaughter, hosted the event, which raised £76,000 on the night.
- In the studio, we put in place new hygiene rules to reduce the risk of infection, set up a dedicated 'Zoom computer' in each studio, and installed perspex dividers between the presenter and co-presenter positions. We also helped volunteers record their shows from home if they preferred.

Recognising Marlow's unsung heroes

Until last year, we handed out *Hidden Gems* awards each year to the 'best' of the town, with categories like 'best dining experience', 'pub of the year', and 'arts event of the year'. Obviously many of the categories became redundant in 2020.

But every day, on-air, we were speaking to people in our town who were going the extra mile to help others during the pandemic, and we realised it was probably more important than ever to recognise them, and their often unacknowledged acts of kindness.

So we came up with the *Hidden Heroes* awards - listeners were able to make nominations through our website, and a panel from Marlow FM, Marlow Town Council, and the Chamber of Trade and Commerce chose the winners.

There was no shortage of worthy nominees, and, in fact, virtually every nominated person or organisation, 15 in all, won. Many were involved in making sure those in need, or who had to stay home, got meals or their prescriptions. One published a poem each day of the lockdown, sharing the highs and lows of our predicament. And one young man, Josh Mustard (pictured here), set up a business making dog biscuits and donated half of his profits to charity.



Instead of our usual black-tie dinner event, we held the awards ceremony as part of *The Marlow Christmas Drive-In* on the evening of 19th December. We covered the event live on-air with an outside broadcast from Marlow Rugby Club.



Sharing community information

With people shielding and generally not being out and about as much, we wanted them to be able to get the latest updates on the radio. We set up a new channel on our internal Slack communication tool so that our volunteers could share the latest information on opening times and delivery services in the area, and give this information out on-air more easily.

Two of our volunteers, Carla Delaney and Mike Cannon, took the lead in interviewing those in charge of running local medical centres and Covid vaccination centres. They were able to pose questions from listeners, and get to the bottom of rumours circulating on social media.

Having a not so quiet night in!

Local resident and chef Tom Kerridge set up the Meals from Marlow project at the start of lockdown to deliver 750 meals a week to key workers and those in need in the local area. With more than 100,000 meals already provided, by March of this year it was time to raise money to keep the project going.

On 27th March 2021, we broadcast *Marlow's Quiet Night In*, a special two-hour live fundraising event organised along with Brand Events and Tom Kerridge. One of our own volunteers, Amelia Slaughter, hosted the event. She was joined by local residents, including Chris Evans and Russell Brand. £76,000 was raised on the night.



Our director of transmission, Tim Ashburner, lent video equipment he normally uses to live stream local church services. This allowed us to create 'Marlow TV' for the evening so that people could watch as well as listen (pictured below). It seems most of the town joined in - we peaked at more than 3,000 simultaneous live streams.



Keeping our presenters safe

As the months went on, and the Covid rules and guidelines changed, we made changes to how we operated the station.

From the start, we put in place new hygiene rules to reduce the risk of infection, and operated a one-person-in-the-studio-at-a-time policy. We also changed the schedule and put short pre-recorded programmes between live shows - this meant we could make sure the incoming and outgoing presenters didn't cross over in the studios.

Later, we set up a dedicated 'Zoom computer' in each studio so that presenters could broadcast once again with their co-presenter, and have guests on. And before we allowed co-presenters back in the studio, we installed perspex dividers between the presenter and co-presenter positions.

We made it clear we didn't expect anyone to come into the studio if they didn't feel comfortable doing so, and we helped them record their shows from home if they preferred.