

4th September 2020



Chief Executive

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Good afternoon,

For many residents the first week of September is focused on the new school year; after a chance to recharge batteries, it's a return to uniforms, routines and, ultimately, the classroom. So too is it a focus for us as we support schools in welcoming back pupils and settling in a new year-group.

This year it has felt distinctly different with the additional preparations needed to ensure that our schools are as safe as they can be for pupils. Of course, schools never fully closed and for the children of key workers and specific year groups there were still opportunities to go to school before the holidays. The challenge now has been to get ready for the return of whole school communities.

Throughout the summer, headteachers and their teams have been working very hard on this, acting on the guidance to open safely and providing reassurance to parents and carers about the arrangements that have been put in place. They have done this with the support of our Education team and we have been grateful to all who have been involved in these preparations.

This work has been going on both at mainstream schools as well as in our specialist settings. We have been, and will continue to support pupils with special educational needs and disabilities to ensure they feel comfortable with the new arrangements. Yesterday our Education team met with a number of headteachers who reported pupils with huge smiles on their faces – happy to be back and pleased to see friends they have missed. No doubt this will be the same at schools across the district.


The return to school marks another step away from lockdown and towards a gradual return to normal. Aside from having schools now open again, the round-the-clock pedestrianisation of Newbury town centre comes to an end this weekend. A 24/7 closure was introduced as a temporary measure to encourage people back to the centre – creating more space for residents to socially distance and additional outdoor seating areas for businesses. With parents starting to do the school run and life slowly returning to normal it's time to move on and relieve the pressure the closure creates on surrounding roads.

We are continuing to support local businesses and it was fantastic to see the Eat Out to Help Out scheme was such a success. It has encouraged residents to begin eating out again, giving them a chance to see the changes which have been introduced and to dine out in confidence. Although nationally the scheme is not being extended, there are local eateries continuing to offer the same or similar offers - look out for them and do continue to support our local hospitality sector.

Support for the local economy continues and as well as measures we have discussed in previous Weeknotes we are supporting the Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership to develop a regional economic recovery plan – as well as developing one of our own focused specifically on West Berkshire.

Our high streets and local businesses make an important contribution towards our local economy and it's good to see shoppers returning as they become more comfortable with the new social distancing arrangements. These guidelines will be in place for a while and with the colder weather on its way and people spending more time inside they are as important now as they ever were. Please don't allow complacency to creep in; we need to keep it up for a while longer yet. A personal plea from us too; please remember to make sure face coverings are worn over both the mouth and nose unless you have a medical condition which makes this difficult. Unfortunately we still see people out with coverings under the nose; worn properly the face covering will minimise the risk of spreading Covid-19 to one another.

Yours sincerely,



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