

7th May 2020



Chief Executive

West Berkshire Council
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Good afternoon

We have been updating you each week on the ongoing local situation with regards to PPE, testing and our capacity to meet local demand. At present, this remains stable and we are able to do so, although we will update you if this changes.

Sadly, there have been a number of deaths in our care homes and we would wish to send on our sincere condolences to those who have lost a loved one. Our social care staff continue to do all they can to keep residents safe and we want to reassure you that West Berkshire Council and our health and social care colleagues are well-prepared to support the community. We also continue to offer support through our Community Support Hub, which is likely to be the case for some time yet as we support those who are particularly vulnerable at this time.

As social distancing guidance is reviewed, this is likely to have an impact on the services we provide, from our Recycling Centres and schools to libraries and leisure centres. You may also have heard that we will be receiving additional funding from the Government to support local businesses. Details of this are not yet available so we would encourage you to sign up to our weekly newsletter which will provide up to date information about the status of these services. This can be done here:

<https://bit.ly/39R80eP>

The theme of this week's letter is recovery and engagement. We know that for some of you, but by no means all, recovery seems like a distant concept. Some of you will have been directly impacted through the loss of a loved one, others will find that their mental health has suffered as result of prolonged social distancing while many will have found home schooling has made home life more challenging than before.

As we write, the Market Street development adjacent to our offices has resumed, albeit it whilst adhering to very strict social distancing measures. It is a visual representation of what we will all have to do in the coming weeks, months and years: planning for the future whilst adapting to our changing present.

We mentioned to you in our last letter that we have been trying to further develop community networks in recent years and it is becoming increasingly clear that this situation has accelerated this more significantly than we could have imagined. If our local recovery is to be successful, this must become a lasting legacy of this situation.

For our part, officers across the authority will be meeting- via Zoom- to discuss what a local recovery plan will look like. Top of the agenda is likely to be how we can better engage our residents, businesses and stakeholders in this process so that we can ensure our plan is inclusive and represents the real impact of Covid-19 on our community. We have been looking at three forms of engagement when considering how we might do this: informing, consulting and involving.

In the past few months, we have developed the 'informing' part of this significantly and the level of communications activity we are producing has increased. From leaflets and newsletters, to graphics and videos to a new advice bot on our website, we have worked hard to make important information accessible in a variety of ways. We will continue much of this as it has been valued and has assisted many as they support others in the community.

In terms of 'consultation', we will be developing a community survey shortly which will be a useful barometer of public feeling and confidence in our resilience at a local level. We will also look to host online sessions with local groups to get their views directly and do all we can to include input from those who are not usually represented among those who respond to our consultations.

As for 'involving', this is already well underway as a result of this situation. We are exploring a number of ways to keep this going so that the involvement of community groups, individuals and parish and town councils in the immediate response can be extended into the recovery period and beyond. We are all proud of the way in which West Berkshire has responded to this emergency and we know that many of you will look forward to joining us in these efforts.

Finally, this Friday is VE Day; an opportunity to celebrate and reflect on the end of a very difficult period for our country. We are sure many of you were looking to marking this occasion with your loved ones but that this is no longer possible due to our need to continue with social distancing. Thank you all once again for your support with this and for staying at home to protect others

Yours sincerely,



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