

12th June 2020



Chief Executive

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Good afternoon

Yesterday the NHS released new figures from the first week of the new test and trace system. They show that 8,000 people tested positive coronavirus and led to 31,000 people they had been in close contact with being asked to self-isolate for 14 days. They managed to reach most of those people – 85% - within 24 hours.

Although the front line response is provided by the NHS, local authorities have a role to play and this has been a focus for us over the past week or two. At a national level, the NHS is responsible for testing people with suspected Covid-19 and, for positive tests, alerting close contacts so they too can self-isolate and keep others safe. Our role is to help with arrangements 'on the ground' here in West Berkshire.

Our Public Health team have been leading the charge in putting in place the local arrangements should test and trace identify a local outbreak. This is looking at a range of measures to help prevent outbreaks or manage them if they occur. This work has included mapping out areas of heightened risk and making sure they have appropriate measures in place. The work requires collaboration across the Council – from public transport to care homes, and nurseries to leisure centres it requires collaboration to make sure we have the right measures in place to prevent an outbreak, and the right response ready should we need it. Much of this work is already underway, with social distancing advice and safety materials provided to local businesses, social distancing on Council transport being worked through and care homes putting in place resilience plans to make sure they are as prepared as can be for whatever is around the corner.

Our Community Support Hub continues to play an important role, working hand in hand with the community and voluntary sector, to support our communities. Should the test and trace system identify vulnerable people who need to self-isolate we stand ready to support them if they need our help.

As a result of test and trace, some people will be asked to self-isolate – just as the social distancing guidelines are eased. With summer well and truly on its way, shops reopening and the sight of others out and about enjoying themselves (from two meters apart, remember!) some people might find it hard to stay at home. It is vital that we do so if we are asked to – it is the only way to keep each other safe. The last thing any of us want to do is become a contact and pass the virus on to someone else. Washing your hands thoroughly for 20 seconds and maintaining social distancing remain the most effective way of preventing the spread of infection.

Talking of safety, it's also important to be vigilant for scams as criminals will seek any opportunity to exploit people – sadly, this includes the Covid-19 pandemic. Please be vigilant, and remember that contact tracers will only call you from 0300 013 5000. They will never:

- ask you to dial a premium rate number to speak to them (for example, those starting 09 or 087)
- ask you to make any form of payment or purchase a product or any kind
- ask for any details about your bank account
- ask for your social media identities or login details, or those of your contacts
- ask you for any passwords or PINs, or ask you to set up any passwords or PINs over the phone
- ask you to download any software to your PC or ask you to hand over control of your PC, smartphone or tablet to anyone else
- ask you to access any website that does not belong to the government or NHS

For more information about test and trace – including how the system works and what to do if you have symptoms – visit <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/nhs-test-and-trace-how-it-works>

You can also [sign up to receive our Covid-19 newsletter](#) for future updates on Test and Trace.

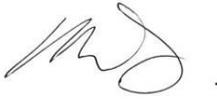
Aside from test and trace we have been working with our businesses to reopen safely. Our high streets are important both to our residents, and to the health of our local economy. We've been busy posting out leaflets to more than 300 businesses, we held a webinar on Wednesday to offer advice and answer questions, and we've been listening to what high street businesses tell us they need to operate safely and doing our best to help. So, for example, we're looking at allowing additional outdoor seating giving businesses more space for customers and with it more room for social distancing. Our high streets are opening for business and we hope you will support them after what has been a difficult few months for them.

This week the Council has been celebrating the role of carers. Like Volunteers Week last week, it is an annual fixture in our calendar but this year it is especially apt given everything that is going on right now. Looking after family or friends who are disabled, ill, older, or who otherwise need support is hard enough at the best of times. Through Covid-19 it has been even harder – people have needed more care while the need for social distancing has made it harder for them to get breaks.

We want to say thank you to all the carers across the district who have been looking after others not for recognition or reward but simply because they care. They probably don't realise the true impact their selfless work is having.

Carers week is also important to us because as a Council we are lucky to have people working for us and with us who do a fantastic job caring for others. Staff in our residential homes do a wonderful job for the residents they care for and we know the past few months have been particularly tough. Our foster carers do an important job caring for children who need looking after, and we also work hard to support young carers – children who spend a great deal of their time looking after family members. To all carers in the district we say a heartfelt thank you for the care and compassion you show to others.

Yours sincerely,



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