

15th May 2020



Chief Executive

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Good afternoon

We write to you at the end of a week which has seen a slight shift in the messaging we have all become familiar with in the previous few months as the Government looks to a phased relaxation of lockdown guidance. For some, this will not change anything for the time being but for others this will mean a return to work for the first time in weeks, which brings with it new challenges.

For our part, we have been working with our partners to re-open **public space car parks** and **Household Waste Recycling Centres** and we have also been considering how to ensure that social distancing in our **town centres** can continue after more businesses re-open. Our Business Rates team has now distributed over £23m in Covid-19 **business grants** and will soon move to distributing additional funding once guidance has been received. This will enable us to support more local firms, which will be key to the district's economic recovery. Our **schools** colleagues are assisting our Head Teachers as they put plans in place for a safe return to school for some children and our **social care** staff continue to look after many of those who are most vulnerable to the virus. As the situation changes in June, July and beyond we will continue to support you all as further guidance is issued.

Last week we spoke about engagement and the work we are starting to carry out to increase this so that more residents and businesses are involved in the work we do. One of the things that will help us to do this is an online survey, which we will launch next week. The questions it contains will range from how they feel about the social, environmental and economic impact of Covid-19 to the interaction that they have had with our own services throughout the current situation. We want to make sure that the response to this is as widespread as possible and that it is a barometer of how local people have been affected by the virus and how they feel about the future. We will give details of how to access the survey next week and would appreciate your help in sharing it with family, neighbours in friends across West Berkshire.

The VE Day commemorations on Friday 8th May, including the national singalong to 'We'll Meet Again', will have resonated in ways that none of us could have contemplated even as recently as two months ago. Reflecting on the end of a difficult period in our nation's history at a time when the majority of us are separated from loved ones and are unsure what the future holds made the occasion particularly poignant. On the West Berkshire Council crest is the phrase 'Forward Together'. Many of you will have never noticed this before or thought about what relevance it might have to the work we do as a local authority. The phrase has its origins in speech made in 1940 by then Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, in which he reflected on the need to collectively work with each other towards a common goal. The challenge we face now is significantly different to that faced at the outbreak of World War II but the need to pull together rings as true now as it did then.

As work on our local recovery gathers pace, we will make sure that 'Forward Together' is central to our thinking and that our planning and decision-making reflects the views and needs of those we serve. Not only this, but we will seek to bring those groups and individuals who have been so integral to our local response to Covid-19 into the recovery process so that the networks and contacts we have all valued and relied upon in recent months strengthen our community for the future.

Next week marks Mental Health Awareness Week. We will focus on this issue in our update next Friday as it is something that will have touched most of us in some way. Our Public Health Team has been busy preparing resources to help those who are finding the current situation particularly difficult and we look forward to sharing them with you in the coming week.

As we say every week, we sincerely thank you all for your efforts, whether they have been through working directly on the response, supporting your neighbours or simply by staying at home unless going out is absolutely necessary. You have all made a difference in your own way and we are grateful to every one of you.

Yours sincerely,



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