

8th April 2020



Chief Executive

West Berkshire Council
Council Offices
Market Street Newbury
Berkshire RG14 5LD

Our Ref: nc/rab

Your Ref:

Please ask for: Nick Carter

Direct Line: 01635 519101

e-mail: nick.carter@westberks.gov.uk

Good afternoon

As we come to the end of the third week of the current social distancing measures, we are writing to you again to update you on some of the work we have all been doing to keep West Berkshire safe and to maintain a good service for our residents.

Our **Community Support Hub** continues to support volunteers as they offer help to hundreds of vulnerable people. We've been humbled by the level of support from community groups and our parishes and towns as we ensure help is given to those who need it and feel very proud to see West Berkshire residents coming together in these difficult times. There is so much good work going on and we are keen to celebrate it. If you have a good story about the work your group has been doing, please consider sharing it on social media using the hashtag #WBCommunityLove so that we can help you to do this. Volunteers should also join our dedicated Facebook page for useful tips, guidance and to share their experiences:

www.facebook.com/CommunitySupportHubGroup

Our first **e-bulletin** will be sent out this week- you can sign up here bit.ly/39R80eP This will provide residents and businesses with a useful weekly update on our COVID-19 response straight to their inbox.

As we mentioned last week, we have received our funding allocation from the Government and have started to contact eligible **businesses** by email. We have started to release funding by BACS from this week. There is no need to apply for this grant as we know which businesses are eligible and are contacting them directly. If you have received an email from us, please respond with your completed form as soon as possible so that we can release your payment. Over 2,200 businesses across West Berkshire are eligible for this funding, representing over £29 million of investment. If you have not yet received your email, rest assured we will be in touch soon. As always, if your business is in need of support, there is useful information available on our website:

www.westberks.gov.uk/coronavirus-business

We continue to update our Residents' Page with details of which of our services are running. Many of them are finding creative new ways of providing their usual activities, which has been great to see.

Our **Libraries** Service is offering a new online service to residents so that they can continue to enjoy new books and to share their love of reading without leaving the house. They have set up a new Facebook group called West Berks Reads, which is a useful, alternative way for people to share their thoughts and pick up ideas for what to read next.

www.facebook.com/groups/wberksreads.

They also hosted their first YouTube Storytime on 8th April, with author Rachel Jane reading one of her 'Campervan' stories. You can watch this again on their YouTube page and keep an eye out for further dates, which we will promote through social media.

Meanwhile, the digital resources and e-library services are continuing 24/7 and understandably being very well used at this time. Why not go to the Libraries page on our website and discover a new book or magazine?

<http://info.westberks.gov.uk/libraries>

We are also pleased to highlight that we have managed to ensure that our **Waste Collection** teams continue to serve our district with a full kerbside service as we know this is a priority for our residents. We will keep this running for as long as we possibly can. As mentioned last week, we have closed our Household Waste Recycling Centres in order to prioritise kerbside collections. This does mean that some residents will have to safely hold onto any additional bulky items. Please don't be tempted to burn them on a **bonfire** in your garden. Bonfire smoke can have a harmful effect on those with respiratory problems so avoiding bonfires is important at this time.

For those with children who were due to take **GCSEs or A-Levels**, the Government has released details of how these will be awarded this summer as exams will not take place. Our schools and colleges are being asked to provide assessment grades for their students. These will be fair, objective and carefully considered judgements of the grades schools and colleges believe their students would have been most likely to achieve if they had sat their exams, and should take into account the full range of available evidence. More about this can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/how-gcses-as-a-levels-will-be-awarded-in-summer-2020>

As you may have seen in the news, a special **Primary Care Hub** is being set up at Newbury Racecourse for local people showing symptoms of coronavirus, but not needing immediate hospital treatment. This will be in the first-aid room at the east entrance to Newbury Racecourse. It will open Monday to Friday, initially, from 10am to 4pm but will not be 'walk-in' - it will only be available to patients who have already gone through a structured medical assessment. Anyone starting to show the coronavirus symptoms of a constant cough and/or high temperature, should still self-isolate for seven days and seek advice from NHS 111 online if required at:

<https://111.nhs.uk/>

Our **Public Health** Team has continued to put together daily useful health and wellbeing tips for those who are struggling with working from home or with their mental health. Please follow us, if you do not already, using the handle @westberkshire on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to see how these might help you.

We know that being confined to our homes can be particularly worrying for those experiencing **domestic violence**, which is why we're continuing to help residents who are concerned about this. Domestic violence is not acceptable in any situation. If you are in immediate danger, please call 999 and ask for the police. Alternatively, A2Dominion provides our local domestic abuse service from 10am-7pm Monday-Friday. They can be contacted on 0800 731 0055 or das@a2dominion.co.uk

Most importantly, we thank you for continuing to follow the Government's social distancing guidance. We know this is not easy, particularly during what is usually a time spent with extended family and friends, but can assure you that it is helping us and the NHS to keep the community safe.

We wish you and your families a happy, healthy Easter weekend

Yours sincerely,



Lynne Doherty
Leader of the Council
lynne.doherty@westberks.gov.uk



Nick Carter
Chief Executive
nick.carter@westberks.gov.uk