

18th September 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,

To help local authorities get through the worst of Covid-19 a range of financial assistance has been made available by central Government. We have not been shy in applying for the discretionary funding which is available, or spending our share of the money allocated to all councils. As well as helping distribute £29m in grants to local businesses and securing funding for active travel schemes we have also been using it to support us through the additional and unforeseen spend required through Covid-19.

Earlier this week we heard that we had been successful in our latest funding application for money to continue supporting our rough sleepers. This is welcome news and will make a big difference to some of our most vulnerable residents.

When Covid-19 began to take hold earlier in the year we worked swiftly to make sure our rough sleepers were safe and had somewhere to go at a time when we were all being asked to stay at home. Early on in our response it was clear that a small number of homeless people and rough sleepers were unlikely to safely self-isolate and needed extra help.

Together with our partners a task force was set up to help them and we successfully found accommodation for them – utilising hotel rooms and bed and breakfasts where necessary. It made a huge difference and we were pleased and proud of the work we did at short notice to help. Through the new funding awarded to us this week, we will have around £184,000 to continue this work. It will help provide accommodation in the private rented sector, secure interim accommodation and allow us to assess the wider support needed for these vulnerable people to rebuild their lives. As we approach the colder weather the good this funding will do in keeping people off the streets cannot be underestimated.

Housing continues to be an important theme for us and in particular our efforts to ensure we have a good housing mix in West Berkshire which has something for everyone. Today we've launched a consultation on our draft Housing Strategy 2020 – 2036. It's an important strategy which will deliver a balanced housing market for our residents as well as those people looking to move to the area.

One of the things we aim to address through the strategy is the need to adapt our housing plans as our local population changes. We know our population is set to grow – by about 5% - in the years to 2036. At the moment we have a relatively young population but the forecasts indicate that it will become older and with smaller households. These are trends we need to anticipate

and plan for in the new strategy. We're particularly keen to hear from younger residents about to enter the housing market and from key workers but we hope for a wide range of responses to ensure the strategy meets local needs.

Elsewhere Covid-19 continues to dominate the national headlines. Right now we're busy working to support the introduction of a new NHS Test and Trace app which will be available from next Thursday. The app will be used alongside traditional contact tracing to notify users if they come into contact with someone who later tests positive for coronavirus. It will do more than that, however, helping the NHS understand how the virus is spreading and informing how we all respond, allowing people to order a coronavirus test and to check into venues.

Local businesses will be supporting this new app and you'll begin to see QR codes appearing at venues that work with the app and its track and trace functionality. You'll see plenty of publicity about this over the coming days and please do download the app and use it to keep yourself and other safe.

Finally, an important point for us to end on and one which we continue to be asked about – and that's on testing availability. There continues to be a high demand on the Covid-19 testing system nationally and this is causing some delays to getting a test. We know that this will cause some anxiety and make it harder for families – particularly those worried about work commitments or schooling if they or a relative have to self-isolate. However, it's really important that we do all continue to follow the advice so that we reduce the spread of the virus and avoid any further restrictions.

As we said last week, the pressure is on the testing capacity at the labs and not at the test centres – so local testing centres may at times currently appear quiet and booking slots may be harder to come by. This is because the Department of Health and Social Care is prioritising tests in areas where there are higher rates of Covid-19.

Nationally, the advice is that if you're unable to get a test at a convenient time or location you should wait and try again when more testing slots are released. Please don't turn up without an appointment. If someone in your household has coronavirus symptoms you should continue to self-isolate while you arrange to get a test for all household members. Please only book a Covid-19 test if you have symptoms or if you've been asked to do so by NHS Test and Trace or a clinician.

To download the NHS COVID-19 app, search for "NHSCOV1D-19" in the Apple Store / Google Play Store on your phone. By downloading and using the app, you'll be helping protect those around you – friends, family, colleagues and local communities.

Yours sincerely,



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



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