

21st August 2020



Chief Executive

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Good afternoon,

Education was the focus of our update last week and since then exam results have continued to dominate the headlines. On Monday, the Department for Education announced changes to the way in which results are calculated with teachers' assessments being used to award A Level, AS Level and GCSE results. This was the right thing to do for our young people. They have worked hard for two years and no one could have foreseen the disruption to their last months of study. They will now receive the grades they expected, but the uncertainty and confusion will have affected many of them and their future plans may have been altered as a result. We will continue to work with schools to support pupils through this.

Elsewhere, there continues to be media coverage about the NHS Test and Trace service and this is an issue which has been cropping up in the inboxes of councillors as residents ask about this service and how it is doing. NHS Test and Trace is a vital component of the local and national strategy to control the spread of COVID-19 by providing an effective testing and contact tracing system. Let us reassure you that we are working hard and in close partnership with our NHS colleagues to support the national and local efforts to tackle COVID-19.

The Council's Local Outbreak Control Cell, chaired by our Public Health Consultant, comprises senior Public Health and Environmental Health officers who meet weekly to review the implementation of the Local Outbreak Control Plan. This includes monitoring the case notifications received by the council from NHS Test and Trace and the local 'soft' intelligence shared by the council's officers with responsibility for the response and preparedness in complex settings.

In addition, our Public Health Consultant meets regularly with the Directors of Public Health and fellow Consultants in Berkshire to review all aspects of COVID-19 outbreak control, including test and trace.

Some councils are implementing their own systems to complement NHS Test and Trace to assist in tracing people who have not yet responded to the national system. At present this has not been necessary here. However, we continue to work closely with the national Test and Trace system, in conjunction with Public Health and Environmental colleagues across Berkshire. As and when the recently announced National Institute for Health Protection is formed we will look to having the same level of collaborative working as we do with our current partners.

Coronavirus testing continues to be available locally. Anyone can get a test, and we would encourage people to do so even if they have mild symptoms. You can book a test online or phone 119 and choose to have a kit delivered to your home or to have the test at the testing centre at Newbury Showground. It's a straightforward process – staff will meet you at the entrance and show you what you need to do. Please do self-isolate if you or someone you live with has symptoms, or if you are asked to do so by the NHS Test and Trace team.

As we get used to living our lives whilst managing the risk of Covid we have been helping support businesses and events to open up. This week, for example, we have been working with the organisers of Medicine Festival, which is taking place at Wasing Park next weekend. Government guidelines allow the event to go ahead and we have been providing guidance to the organisers of the precautionary measures which need to be put in place for the event to go ahead safely. We are clear that West Berkshire is open for business and we will continue to support the business to recover from coronavirus.

Yours sincerely,



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