

5<sup>th</sup> June 2020



**Chief Executive**

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Council Offices  
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Good afternoon

For many people responding to Covid-19 the past few weeks have felt pretty relentless with events since the middle of March quickly taking on a life of their own. It is hard to believe quite how quickly time has flown by whilst we've been focused on supporting our communities and our staff, and delivering our services wherever we could do so safely.

Just as we turn another page on the calendar, it feels like we have also turned a corner as we move from a focus on response to recovery. Although most of the services we provide remained open, a few had to close or be scaled back due to government guidance. We are continuing to get these up and running as national guidance is updated.

This week we've been able to begin our At Home library service with staff dropping off books to our most vulnerable residents. It's a service which is valued by the people who use it – not only welcoming the new books but the friendly face who delivers them too. Of course, these visits are having to be done from a distance for the time being.

Elsewhere, schools have reopened this week to more pupils with several year groups returning to class. Our Education Service has been busy supporting our teachers and Governors to reopen the schools and to reassure parents that schools will only open with appropriate arrangements in place.

As we continue on our road to recovery we are looking ahead to the reopening of our high streets over the next few weeks and the welcome return to trading for many of our businesses, and to other services such as our libraries and leisure centres opening once government guidance deems it safe to do so.

This is welcome progress towards 'normality' but it remains to be seen what the long-term effects will be. We are keen to grasp the opportunity to do things differently although it remains to be seen what this looks like in future. It is an area we are looking at closely and which we are keen to hear your thoughts on. If you haven't already done so please take part in our residents' survey before it closes on 8<sup>th</sup> June.

These first steps down the road to recovery have all been possible in part due to the national testing and tracing initiative. Councils have an important part to play in this and we are currently working to put in place the arrangements to support individual residents, or any small communities who must isolate themselves. We are still working through the detail but it's clear that our Community Support Hub will continue to play an important role in supporting residents who are shielded, and the community and voluntary groups working throughout the district. We will be keeping the Hub in place until at least December to continue this support for the voluntary and community sector.

Test and trace is only one part of the solution and the onus remains on us all to continue following the social distancing guidance. The difference this makes in keeping us safe, and those around us safe should not be underestimated. It's tough but it's necessary and we ask you to stick with it.

That said, the latest guidance does allow us increased freedom and it's now possible to meet family and friends under some conditions. One of the advantages of living and working in such a beautiful area is that there is lots to encourage us outdoors. It's good for our physical and mental wellbeing and certainly we wouldn't want to discourage anyone from doing so. However, please do remember to observe social distancing and to take any litter home with you so that our countryside remains a place we can all enjoy.

This week it's Volunteers' Week and here at the council we have been busy celebrating those who volunteer with us or elsewhere in their communities. The Community Support Hub has been supported by a wide range of volunteers and is a powerful example of what can be achieved when we all work together. Earlier this week we were delighted to receive a letter from Mary Riall, the Berkshire High Sheriff, and which sums up the work of our volunteers in recent weeks.

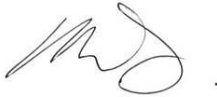
*I have been told about the wonderful work that has done by you and fellow employees of West Berkshire Council to set up and run the West Berkshire Community Hub. I understand you have all had to step into very different roles and in a remarkably short time managed to start meeting the needs of the vulnerable and isolated in West Berkshire during the pandemic.*

*You will have made such a difference at a dark and difficult time for so many and it is thanks to people like yourself that so many residents who would otherwise feel forgotten and fearful instead know they are valued and have real hope for the future. I loved reading the comments on your local heroes page which so clearly show peoples appreciation.*

*On behalf of the wider Berkshire community thank you and your helpers for all you are doing. You join a large group of hidden Berkshire heroes who are making all the difference to our communities at this extraordinary time and you give us all a reason to smile and be positive.*

On behalf of everyone at the Council and to all the volunteers across West Berkshire we say thank you very much for all that you do.

Yours sincerely,



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