

22<sup>nd</sup> May 2020



**Chief Executive**

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Good afternoon

This week we have been preparing for the next phase of our response to Covid-19 as we make arrangements for the changes coming on 1<sup>st</sup> June. We know that these changes will be a source of anxiety for some so we want to reassure you that we are working with schools, businesses, parish councils and community groups to make sure they can take place safely.

Across West Berkshire, Headteachers are finalising plans to welcome more children back into schools, colleges and early years settings safely from 1<sup>st</sup> June onwards. Each school faces individual circumstances in relation to available staff, buildings and the number of children returning. In each case, detailed risk assessments are taking place and we are working closely with all school staff to support them and their pupils to make this process as smooth as possible for all concerned.

We have also looked closely at how retail centres can welcome shoppers and have issued a traffic order to temporarily close parts of Newbury Town Centre to traffic to assist with queuing and to allow safe walking and cycling. To further help with this, we have created posters and other resources that businesses can download to help them manage social distancing and will also be contacting our parish councils to explore whether any additional measures are required across West Berkshire. Further information can be found at:

[www.westberks.gov.uk/covid19-businesspack](http://www.westberks.gov.uk/covid19-businesspack)

This week is Mental Health Awareness Week. Taking time to mark this seems even more poignant this year as it is becoming increasingly clear that the current situation is taking its toll on many residents. Our Community Support Hub has seen an increase in requests for emotional support in the past few weeks which shows that those who have been told that they must remain at home are feeling an even greater strain on their mental health. People often find the strength to cope with a situation for the short-term, but this is not sustainable and as more time goes on it becomes more difficult to manage.

Every Mind Matters has some very useful information about how to look after your mental health and cope with the anxiety caused by the current situation. If you or someone you know is struggling, we would encourage you to take a look at this important resource, which is produced by the NHS, to find out about the support available:

<https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/>

Last week we mentioned our Residents' Survey, which goes live at 5pm on 22<sup>nd</sup> May and will be available for two weeks. In the survey we ask a number of questions which range from the direct impact of Covid-19 on individuals to the local prospects of recovery. These views will be an important part of the development of our local Recovery Strategy. We have also included some questions about volunteering and the sense of 'connectedness' with the community. We are particularly keen to see the answers to these questions because we know that the Recovery Strategy is not something we will be able to deliver in isolation. We want to involve as many local people as possible in this process and we hope the survey will give us some idea of how best to do that.

If you know someone who would like to fill out the survey but cannot access the internet, please contact the team using the details on the web form and we will arrange for a copy of the survey to be posted to them.

The survey can be found here:

<https://info.westberks.gov.uk/residentsurvey-covid19>

We would like to finish our message, as we do every week, by thanking you for all you are doing to support our district at this time. Whether it's by volunteering, home schooling, supporting a neighbour or loved one or simply staying at home, we are all part of the local effort and it is this strong community that will drive our recovery.

Yours sincerely,



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